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Noises Off

A Play in Three Acts

Michael Frayn

MICHAEL FRAYN

Noises Off

Michael Frayn has written plays, novels, and screenplays, in addition to being a journalist, documentary filmmaker, and translator of Chekhov. His thirteen plays include *Copenhagen*, which was awarded the Tony Award for Best Play, as well as the Outer Critics Circle and Drama Desk awards and, in the United Kingdom, the Olivier and *Evening Standard* awards. His novel *Headlong* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. His most recent novel, *Spies*, was published in 2002. Born in London in 1933 and educated at Cambridge, Frayn is married to the biographer and critic Claire Tomalin; they live in London.

ALSO BY MICHAEL FRAYN

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Noises Off

A Play in Three Acts

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Anchor Books

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Author's Note

This play has gone through many different forms and versions. Here, to avoid any mysteries or confusions, is a brief history.

It began life as a short one-actor entitled *Exits*, commissioned by the late Martin Tickner, for a midnight matinee of the Combined Theatrical Charities at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on 10 September 1977, where it was directed by the late Eric Thompson, and played by Denis Quilley, Patricia Routledge, Edward Fox, Dinsdale Landen, and Polly Adams. Michael Codron thereupon commissioned a full-length version, and waited for it with intermittent patience. Michael Blakemore, the director, persuaded me to rethink and restructure for the resulting text, and suggested a great many ideas which I incorporated.

After the play had opened at the Lyric, Hammersmith, in 1982, I did a great deal more rewriting. I went on rewriting, in fact, until Nicky Henson, who was playing Garry, announced on behalf of the cast (rather as Garry himself might have done), that they would learn no further versions.

The play transferred to the Savoy Theatre, and ran until 1987, with five successive casts. For two of the cast-changes I did more rewrites. I also rewrote for the production in Washington in 1983, and I rewrote again when this moved to Broadway.

Reading the English text that has been in use in the past decade and a half I have discovered a series of bizarre misprints, and I suspect that directors have been driven to some quite outlandish devices to make sense of them. What's happened to it in other languages I can for the most part only guess. I know that in France it has been played under two different titles (sometimes simultaneously), and in Germany under four. I imagine that it's often been freely adapted to local circumstances, in spite of the prohibitions in the contract. In France, certainly, my British actors and the characters they are playing turned into Frenchmen, in Italy into Italians (who introduced a 'Sardine Song' between the acts). In Barcelona they were Catalan-speaking actors playing Spanish-speaking characters; in Tampere, in northern Finland, they were robust northerners speaking the Tampere dialect and playing effete southerners with Helsinki accents. On the Japanese poster they all appear to be Japanese; on the Chinese poster Chinese. In Prague they performed the play for some ten years without Act Three, and no one noticed until I arrived.

For the revival at the National Theatre in 2000 I've rewritten yet again. Some of the changes are ones that I've been longing to make myself – there's nothing like having to sit through a play twelve million times to make your fingers itch for the delete key. Many other changes were suggested by the radical criticisms and irresistible inventions of my new director, Jeremy Sams. I hope that no one will

consciously notice the difference, but if I have demolished any particularly cherished errors or suggestive inconsistencies I apologise.

Publisher's Note

Noises Off was first presented, by arrangement with Michael Codron, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, on 23 February 1982, and on 31 March by Michael Codron at the Savoy Theatre, London, with the following cast:

Dotty Otley	Patricia Routledge
Lloyd Dallas	Paul Eddington
Garry Lejeune	Nicky Henson
Brooke Ashton	Rowena Roberts
Poppy Norton-Taylor	Yvonne Antrobus
Frederick Fellowes	Tony Matthews
Belinda Blair	Jan Waters
Tim Allgood	Roger Lloyd Pack
Selsdon Mowbray	Michael Aldridge
Electrician	Ray Edwards

Directed by Michael Blakemore

Designed by Michael Annals

Lighting by Spike Gaden

It was revived in its present form by the Royal National Theatre, in association with the Ambassador Theatre Group and Act Productions Ltd. It previewed in the Lyttelton Theatre on 29 September 2000, and opened on 5 October, with the following cast:

Dotty Otley	Patricia Hodge
Lloyd Dallas	Peter Egan
Garry Lejeune	Aden Gillett
Brooke Ashton	Natalie Walter
Poppy Norton-Taylor	Selina Griffiths
Frederick Fellowes	Jeff Rawle
Belinda Blair	Susie Blake
Tim Allgood	Paul Thornley
Selsdon Mowbray	Christopher Benjamin

Directed by Jeremy Sams

Designed by Robert Jones

Lighting by Tim Mitchell

Sound by Fergus O'Hare for Aura

On 14 May 2001 this production opened at the Piccadilly Theatre, London, with the same cast except for:

Dotty Otley	Lynn Redgrave
Garry Lejeune	Stephen Mangan

It opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, New York, on 1 November 2001, with the following cast:

Dotty Otley
Lloyd Dallas
Garry Lejeune
Brooke Ashton
Poppy Norton-Taylor
Frederick Fellowes
Belinda Blair
Tim Allgood
Selsdon Mowbray

Patti LuPone
Peter Gallagher
Thomas McCarthy
Katie Finneran
Robin Weigert
Faith Prince
Edward Hibbert
T. R. Knight
Richard Easton

Directed by Jeremy Sams

Designed by Robert Jones

Lighting by Tim Mitchell

Sound by Fergus O'Hare for Aura

The cast of *Noises Off* are performing another play, *Nothing On*. The casting in *Nothing On* is as follows:

Mrs. Clackett
Roger Tramplemain
Vicki
Philip Brent
Flavia Brent
Burglar
Sheikh

Dotty Otley
Garry Lejeune
Brooke Ashton
Frederick Fellowes
Belinda Blair
Selsdon Mowbray
Frederick Fellowes

Director Lloyd Dallas

Company and Stage Manager Tim Allgood

Assistant Stage Manager Poppy Norton-Taylor

The action takes place in the living-room of the Brents' country home, on a Wednesday afternoon.

Act One: *The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

(Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare. Monday 14 January)

Act One: *The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

(Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne. Wednesday matinee, 13 February)

Act One: *The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

(Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees. Saturday 6 April)

There is an interval between Act One and Act One. There is no interval between Act One and Act One.

Act One

The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.

(Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare. Monday 14 January.)

From the estate agent's description of the property:

A delightful 16th-century posset mill, 25 miles from London. Lovingly converted, old-world atmosphere, many period features. Fully equipped with every aid to modern living and beautifully furnished throughout by owner now resident abroad. Ideal for overseas company seeking perfect English setting to house senior executive. Minimum three months' let. Apply sole agents: Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

The accommodation comprises: an open-plan living area, with a staircase leading to a gallery. A notable feature is the extensive range of entrances and exits provided. On the ground floor the front door gives access to the mature garden and delightful village beyond. Another door leads to the elegant panelled study, and a third to the light and airy modern service quarters. A fourth door opens into a luxurious bathroom/WC suite, and a full-length south-facing window affords extensive views. On the gallery level is the door to the master bedroom, and another to a small but well-proportioned linen cupboard. A corridor gives access to all the other rooms in the upper parts of the house. Another beautifully equipped bathroom/WC suite opens off the landing

halfway up the stairs.

All in all, a superb example of the traditional English set-builder's craft – a place where the discerning theatregoer will feel instantly at home.

Introductory music. As the curtain rises, the award-winning modern telephone is ringing.

Enter from the service quarters Mrs Clackett , a housekeeper of character. She is carrying an imposing plate of sardines.

Mrs Clackett It's no good you going on. I can't open sardines *and* answer the phone. I've only got one pair of feet. *She puts the sardines down on the telephone table by the sofa, and picks up the phone.*

Hello ... Yes, but there's no one here, love ... No, Mr Brent's not here ... He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain ... Mr Philip Brent, that's right ... The one who writes the plays, that's him, only now he writes them in Spain ... No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here ... Am *I* in Spain? No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with, because it's the royal what's it called on the telly – the royal you know -where's the paper, then ...?

She picks up the newspaper lying on the sofa and searches in it.

... And if it's to do with letting the house then you'll have to ring the house agents, because they're the agents for the house ... Squire, Squire, Hackham and who's the other one

... ? No, they're not in Spain, they're next to the phone in the study. Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on, I'll go and look.

She replaces the receiver.

Or so the stage-directions say in Robin Housemonger's play, Nothing On. In fact, though, she puts the receiver down beside the phone instead.

Always the same, isn't it. Soon as you take the weight off your feet, down it all comes on your head.

Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper.

Or so the stage direction says. In fact, she moves off holding the plate of sardines instead of the newspaper. As she does so, Dotty Otley, the actress who is playing the part of Mrs Clackett, comes out of character to comment on the move.

Dotty And I take the sardines. No, I leave the sardines. No, I take the sardines.

The disembodied voice of Lloyd Dallas , the director of Nothing On, replies from somewhere out in the darkness of the auditorium.

Lloyd You leave the sardines and you put the receiver back.

Dotty Oh yes, I put the receiver back.

She puts the receiver back and moves off again with the sardines.

Lloyd And you leave the sardines.

Dotty And I leave the sardines?

Lloyd You leave the sardines.

Dotty I put the receiver back and I leave the sardines.

Lloyd Right.

Dotty We've changed that, have we, love?

Lloyd No, love.

Dotty That's what I've always been doing?

Lloyd I shouldn't say that, Dotty, my precious.

Dotty How about the words, love? Am I getting some of them right?

Lloyd Some of them have a very familiar ring.

Dotty Only it's like a fruit machine in there.

Lloyd I know that, Dotty.

Dotty I open my mouth, and I never know if it's going to come out three oranges or two lemons and a banana.

Lloyd Anyway, it's not midnight yet. We don't open till tomorrow. So you're holding the receiver.

Dotty I'm holding the receiver.

Lloyd 'Squire, Squire, Hackham and, hold on ...'

Dotty *resumes her performance as Mrs Clackett.*

Mrs Clackett Squire, Squire, Hackham and, hold on, don't go away, I'm putting it down.

She replaces the receiver.

Always the same, isn't it. Put your feet up for two minutes and immediately they come running after you.

Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper.

Only she isn't holding the newspaper.

The sound of a key in the lock.

Lloyd Hold it.

The front door opens. On the doorstep stands Roger , holding a cardboard box. He is about thirty and has the well-appointed air of a man who handles high-class real estate.

Roger ... I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

Lloyd Hold it, Garry. Dotty!

Enter Vicki through the front door. She is a desirable property in her early twenties, well-built and beautifully maintained throughout.

Roger So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

Lloyd Hold it, Brooke. Dotty!

Enter Dotty from the study.

Dotty Come back?

Lloyd Yes, and go out again with the *newspaper*.

Dotty The newspaper? Oh, the newspaper.

Lloyd You put the receiver back, you leave the sardines and you go out with the newspaper.

Garry Here you are, love.

Dotty Sorry, love.

Garry (*embraces her*) Don't worry, love. It's only the technical.

Lloyd It's the dress, Garry, honey. It's the dress rehearsal.

Garry So when was the technical?

Lloyd So when's the dress? We open tomorrow!

Garry Well, we're all thinking of it as the technical. (*To Dotty.*) Aren't we, love?

Dotty It's all those words, my sweetheart.

Garry Don't worry about the words, Dotty, my pet.

Dotty Coming up like oranges and lemons.

Garry Listen, Dotty, your words are fine, your words are better than the, do you know what I mean? (*To Brooke.*) Isn't that right?

Brooke (*her thoughts elsewhere*) Sorry?

Garry (*to Dotty*) I mean, OK, so he's the, you know. Fine. But, Dotty, love, you've been playing this kind of part for, well, you know what I mean.

Lloyd All right? So Garry and Brooke are off, Dotty's holding the receiver ...

Garry No, but here we are, we're all thinking, my God, we open tomorrow, we've only had a fortnight to rehearse, we don't know where we are, but my God, here we are!

Dotty That's right, my sweet. Isn't that right, Lloyd?

Lloyd Beautifully put, Garry.

Garry No, but we've got to play Weston-super-Mare all the rest of this week, then Yeovil, then God knows where, then God

knows where else, and so on for God knows how long, and we're all of us feeling pretty much, you know ... (To **Brooke**.) I mean, aren't you?

Brooke Sorry?

Lloyd Anyway, you're off, Dotty's holding the receiver ...

Garry Sorry, Lloyd. But sometimes you just have to come right out with it. You know?

Lloyd I know.

Garry Thanks, Lloyd.

Lloyd OK, Garry. So you're off ...

Garry Lloyd, let me just say one thing. Since we've stopped. I've worked with a lot of directors, Lloyd. Some of them were geniuses. Some of them were bastards. But I've never met one who was so totally and absolutely ... I don't know ...

Lloyd Thank you, Garry. I'm very touched. Now will you get off the fucking stage?

Exit Garry through the front door.

Lloyd And, Brooke ...

Brooke Yes?

Lloyd Are you in?

Brooke In?

Lloyd Are you there?

Brooke What?

Lloyd You're out. OK. I'll call again. And on we go.

Exit Brooke through the front door.

Lloyd So there you are, holding the receiver.

Dotty So there I am, holding the receiver. I put the receiver back and I leave the sardines.

Mrs Clackett Always the same story, isn't it ...

Lloyd And you take the newspaper.

She comes back, and picks up the newspaper and the receiver.

Dotty I leave the sardines, I take the newspaper.

Mrs Clackett Always the same story, isn't it. It's a weight off

your mind, it's a load off your stomach.

Dotty And off at last I go.

Lloyd Leaving the receiver.

*She replaces the receiver and goes off into the study. Enter **Roger** as before, with the cardboard box.*

Roger ... I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

*Enter **Vicki** as before.*

Roger So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

Roger *goes back and brings in a flight bag, and closes the front door.*

I'll just check.

*He opens the door to the service quarters. **Vicki** gazes round.*

Roger Hello? Anyone at home?

Closes the door.

No, there's no one here. So what do you think?

Vicki Great. And this is all yours?

Roger Just a little shack in the woods, really. Converted posset mill. Sixteenth-century.

Vicki It must have cost a bomb.

Roger Well, one has to have somewhere to entertain one's business associates. Someone coming at four o'clock, in fact. Arab sheikh. Oil. You know.

Vicki Right. And I've got to get those files to our Basingstoke office by four.

Roger Yes, we'll only just manage to fit it in. I mean, we'll only just do it. I mean ...

Vicki Right, then.

Roger *(putting down the box and opening the flight bag)* We won't bother to chill the champagne.

Vicki All these doors!

Roger Oh, only a handful, really. *(He opens the various doors one after another to demonstrate)* Study... Kitchen ... And a self-contained service flat for the housekeeper.

Vicki Terrific. And which one's the ... ?

Roger What?

Vicki You know ...

Roger The usual offices? Through here. *(He opens the downstairs bathroom door for her)*

Vicki Fantastic.

Exit Vicki into the bathroom.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, without the newspaper.

Mrs Clackett Now I've lost the sardines ...

Mutual surprise. Roger closes the door to the bathroom and slips the champagne back into the bag.

Roger I'm sorry. I thought there was no one here.

Mrs Clackett I'm not here. I'm off, only it's the royal you know, where they wear those hats, and they're all covered in fruit, and who are you?

Roger I'm from the agents.

Mrs Clackett From the agents?

Roger Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

Mrs Clackett Oh. Which one are you, then? Squire, Squire, Hackham, or Dudley?

Roger I'm Tramplemain.

Mrs Clackett Walking in here as if you owned the place! I thought you was a burglar.

Roger No, I just dropped in to ... go into a few things ...

The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.

Well, to check some of the measurements ...

The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.

Do one or two odd jobs ...

The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.

Oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective tenant over the house.

The bathroom door opens.

Vicki What's wrong with this door?

Roger *closes it.*

Roger She's thinking of renting it. Her interest is definitely aroused.

Enter Vicki from bathroom.

Vicki That's not the bedroom.

Roger The bedroom? No, that's the downstairs bathroom and WC suite. And this is the housekeeper, Mrs Crockett.

Mrs Clackett Clackett, dear, Clackett.

Vicki Oh. Hi.

Roger She's not really here.

Mrs Clackett Only it's the royal, you know, with the hats.

Roger (to **Mrs Clackett**) Don't worry about us.

Mrs Clackett (*picks up the sardines*) I'll have the sound on low.

Roger We'll just inspect the house.

Mrs Clackett Only now I've lost the newspaper.

Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, carrying the sardines.

Only she leaves them behind.

Lloyd Sardines!

Roger I'm sorry about this.

Vicki That's all right. We don't want the television, do we?

Lloyd Sardines!

Enter Dotty from the study.

Dotty I've forgotten the sardines.

Garry Lloyd! These sardines! They're driving us all mad!

Lloyd Something wrong with the sardines? Poppy!

Garry There's four plates of sardines coming on in Act One alone! They go here, they go there. *She* takes them – *I* take them. (*To Brooke.*) I mean, don't *you* feel, you know?

Brooke (*elsewhere again*) Sorry?

Garry The sardines.

Brooke What sardines?

Enter Poppy, the assistant stage manager, from the wings.

Poppy Change the sardines?

Lloyd Make it four grilled turbot. Off the bone.

Garry (*to Lloyd*) OK, it's all right for you. You're sitting out there. We're up here. We've got to *do* it. Plus we've got bags,

we've got boxes. Plus doors. Plus words. You know what I mean?

Dotty We're not getting at you, Poppy, love. We think the sardines are lovely.

Garry I'm just trying to, you know.

Lloyd So what *do* you want to change, Garry? The bags? The boxes? The doors?

Dotty We can't start *changing things* now, love!

Garry I'm just *saying*. Words. Doors. Bags. Boxes. Sardines. *Us*. OK? I've made my point?

Lloyd You certainly have, Garry. Got that, Poppy?

Poppy Um. Well.

Lloyd Right. On we go. From Dotty's exit. And Poppy ...

Poppy Yes?

Lloyd Don't let this happen again.

Poppy Oh. No.

Exit Poppy into the wings.

Garry Sorry, Lloyd. I just thought we ought to, do you know what I mean?

Lloyd Of course.

Garry Better out than, you know.

Lloyd Much better. As long as Dotty's happy.

Dotty Absolutely happy, Lloyd, my love.

She goes to the study door.

Lloyd Will you do something for me then, Dotty, my precious?

Dotty Anything, Lloyd, my sweet.

Lloyd Take the sardines off with you.

Exit Mrs Clackett into study, carrying the sardines.

Roger I'm sorry about this.

Vicki That's all right. We don't want the television, do we?

Roger Only she's been in the family for generations.

Vicki Great. Come on, then. *(She starts upstairs)* I've got to

be in Basingstoke by four.

Roger Perhaps we should just have a glass of champagne.

Vicki We'll take it up with us.

Roger Yes. Well ...

Vicki And don't let my files out of sight.

Roger No. Only ...

Vicki What?

Roger Well ...

Vicki Her?

Roger She *has* been in the family for generations.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, with the newspaper but without the sardines.

Mrs Clackett Sardines ... Sardines ... It's not for me to say, of course, dear, only I will just say this: don't think twice about it – take the plunge. You'll really enjoy it here.

Vicki Oh. Great.

Mrs Clackett (to Roger) Won't she, love?

Roger Yes. Well. Yes!

Mrs Clackett (to Vicki) And we'll enjoy having you. *(To Roger.)* Won't we, love?

Roger Oh. Well.

Vicki Terrific.

Mrs Clackett Sardines, sardines. Can't put your feet up on an empty stomach, can you.

Exit Mrs Clackett to service quarters.

Vicki You see? She thinks it's great. She's even making us sardines!

Roger Well ...

Vicki I think she's terrific.

Roger Terrific.

Vicki So which way?

Roger (*picking up the bags*) All right. Before she comes back with the sardines.

Vicki Up here?

Roger Yes, yes.

Vicki In here?

Roger Yes, yes, yes.

Exeunt Roger and Vicki into mezzanine bathroom.

Vicki (*off*) It's another bathroom.

They reappear.

Roger No, no, no.

Vicki Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

Roger I mean in *here*.

He nods at the next door – the first along the gallery. Vicki leads the way in. Roger follows.

Vicki Oh, black sheets! (*She produces one*)

Roger It's the airing cupboard. (*He throws the sheet back*) This one, this one.

He drops the bag and box, and struggles nervously to open the second door along the gallery, the bedroom.

Vicki Oh, you're in a real state! You can't even get the door open.

*Exeunt **Roger** and **Vicki** into the bedroom.*

Only they can't, because the bedroom door won't open.

*The sound of a key in the lock, and the front door opens. On the doorstep stands **Philip**, carrying a cardboard box. He is in his forties, with a deep suntan, and writes attractive new plays with a charming period atmosphere.*

Philip ... No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember.

Lloyd Hold it.

*Enter **Flavia**, carrying a flight bag like **Roger's**. She is in her thirties, the perfect companion piece to the above.*

Lloyd Hold it.

Philip We've got the place entirely to ourselves.

Philip *closes the door.*

*Only the door won't stay closed. A pause, while **Garry** struggles to open the door upstairs, and **Frederick** struggles to close the door downstairs.*

Lloyd And God said, Hold it. And they held it. And God saw that it was terrible.

Garry *(to **Frederick** and **Belinda**, the actor and actress playing **Philip** and **Flavia**)* Sorry, loves, this door won't open.

Belinda Sorry, love, this door won't close.

Lloyd And God said, 'Poppy!'

Frederick Sorry, everyone. Am I doing something wrong? You know how stupid I am about doors.

Belinda Freddie, my sweet, you're doing it perfectly.

Frederick As long as it's not me that's broken it.

*Enter **Poppy** from the wings.*

Lloyd And there was Poppy. And God said, Be fruitful and

multiply, and fetch Tim to fix the doors.

Exit Poppy into the wings.

Belinda Oh, I love technicals!

Garry She loves technicals! (*Fondly*) Isn't she just, I mean, honestly, she loves technicals! Dotty! Where's Dotty?

Belinda Everyone's always so nice to everyone.

Garry Oh! Isn't she just, I mean, she really is, isn't she.

Enter Dotty from the service quarters.

Garry (to Dotty) Belinda's being all, you know.

Belinda But Freddie, my precious, don't *you* like a nice all-night technical?

Frederick The only thing I like about technicals is you get a chance to sit on the furniture. (*He sits*)

Belinda Oh, Freddie, my precious! It's lovely to see you cheering up and making jokes.

She sits beside him and embraces him.

Frederick Oh, was that a joke?

Belinda This is such a lovely company to work with. It's such a happy company.

Dotty Wait till we've got to Stockton-on-Tees in twelve weeks time.

Belinda(sits) Are you all right, Lloyd, my precious?

Lloyd I'm starting to know what God felt like when he sat out there in the darkness creating the world. (*He takes a pill*)

Belinda What did he feel like, Lloyd, my love?

Lloyd Very pleased he'd taken his Valium.

Belinda He had six days, of course. We've only got six hours.

Lloyd And God said, 'Where the fuck is Tim?'

Enter from the wings Tim , the company stage manager. He is exhausted.

Lloyd And there the fuck *was* Tim. And God said, 'Let there be doors, that open when they open, and close when they close.'

Tim Do something?

Lloyd Doors.

Tim I was doing the front of house.

Lloyd Doors.

Tim Doors?

Lloyd Tim, are you fully awake?

Belinda Lloyd, he *has* been putting the set up all weekend.

Lloyd You're not trying to do too much, are you, Tim?

Belinda Tim, my love, this door won't close.

Garry And the bedroom won't, you know.

Tim Oh, right. (*He sets to work on the doors*)

Belinda (*to Lloyd*) He hasn't been to bed for forty-eight hours.

Lloyd Don't worry, Tim. Only another twenty-four hours, and it'll be the end of the day.

Lloyd *comes up on stage.*

Belinda Oh, look, he's come down to earth amongst us.

Lloyd Listen. Since we've stopped anyway. OK, it took two days to get the set up, so we shan't have time for a dress rehearsal. Don't worry. Think of the first night as a dress rehearsal. If we can just get through the play once tonight for doors and sardines. That's what it's all about. Doors and sardines. Getting on – getting off. Getting the sardines on - getting the sardines off. That's farce. That's the theatre. That's life.

Belinda Oh, Lloyd, you're so deep.

Lloyd So just keep going. Bang, bang, bang. Bang you're on. Bang you've said it. Bang you're off. And everything will be perfectly ... where's Selsdon?

Belinda Oh no!

Garry Not already?

Belinda Selsdon!

Garry Selsdon!

Lloyd Poppy!

Dotty (*to Lloyd*) I thought he was in front, with you?

Lloyd I thought he was round the back, with you?

Enter Poppy from the wings.

Lloyd Is Mr Mowbray in his dressing-room?

Exit Poppy into the wings.

Frederick Oh, I don't think he would. Not at a technical. (*To Brooke.*) Would he?

Brooke Would who?

Garry Selsdon. We can't find him!

Frederick I'm sure he wouldn't. Not at a technical.

Dotty Half a chance, he would.

Brooke Would what?

Garry, Dotty and Lloyd *make gestures to her of tipping a glass, or raising the elbow, or screwing the nose.*

Belinda Now come on, my sweets, be fair! We don't know.

Frederick Let's not jump to any conclusions.

Lloyd Let's just get the understudy dressed. Tim!

Tim Yes?

Lloyd Hurry up with those doors. You're going on as the Burglar.

Tim Oh. Right.

Dotty He shouldn't have been out of sight! I said, he must never be out of sight!

Belinda He's been as good as gold all the way through rehearsals.

Garry Yes, because in the rehearsal room it was all, I don't know, but there we were, do you know what I mean?

Lloyd There was no set. You could see everyone.

Garry And here it's all, you know.

Lloyd Split into two. There's a front and a back. And instantly we've lost him.

Enter Poppy from the wings.

Poppy He's not in the dressing-room.

Dotty You've looked in the lavatories?

Poppy Yes.

Dotty And the scenery dock and the prop room and the paint store?

Poppy Yes.

Frederick (to Dotty) You've worked with him before, of course.

Lloyd (to Poppy) Ring the police.

Exit Poppy into the wings.

Lloyd (to Tim) Finished the doors? Right, get the Burglar gear on.

Exit Tim into the wings.

Enter Selsdon Mowbray from the back of the stalls. He is in his seventies and is wearing his Burglar gear. He comes down the aisle during the following dialogue and stands in front of the stage, watching everyone on it.

Lloyd I'm sorry, Dotty, my love.

Dotty No, it's my fault, Lloyd, my love.

Lloyd I cast him.

Dotty 'Let's give him one last chance,' I said. 'One last chance!' I mean, what can you do? We were in weekly rep together in Peebles.

Garry (to Dotty) It's my fault, my precious. I shouldn't have let you. This tour for her isn't just, do you know what I mean? This is her life savings!

Lloyd We know that, Garry, love.

Belinda *puts a hand on Dotty's arm.*

Dotty I'm not trying to make my fortune.

Frederick Of course you're not, Dotty.

Dotty I just wanted to put a little something by.

Belinda We know, love.

Garry Just something to buy a little house that she could, I mean, come on, that's not so much to ask.

Brooke *puts a hand to her eye.*

Belinda (to Brooke) Don't you cry, my sweet! It's not *your* fault!

Brook No, I've got something behind my lens.

Frederick Yes, you couldn't expect Brooke to keep anyone in sight.

Dotty *(pointing at Selsdon without seeing him)* But he was standing right there in the stalls before we started! I saw him!

Brooke Who are we talking about now?

Belinda It's all right, my sweet. We know you can't see anything.

Brooke You mean *Selsdon*? I'm not *blind*. I can see *Selsdon*.

They all turn and see him.

Belinda Selsdon!

Garry Oh my God, he's here all the time!

Lloyd Standing there like Hamlet's father.

Frederick My word, Selsdon, you gave us a surprise. We thought you were ... We thought you were ... not there.

Dotty Where have you been, Selsdon?

Belinda Are you all right, Selsdon?

Lloyd Speak to us!

Selsdon Is it a party?

Belinda 'Is it a party?'!

Selsdon Is it? How killing! I got it into my head there was going to be a rehearsal. (*He goes up on to the stage.*) I was having a little postprandial snooze at the back of the stalls so as to be ready for the rehearsal.

Belinda Isn't he lovely?

Lloyd Much lovelier now we can see him.

Selsdon So what are we celebrating?

Belinda 'What are we celebrating?'!

Enter Tim from the wings.

Tim I've looked all through his dressing-room. I've looked all through the wardrobe. I can't find the gear.

Lloyd indicates Selsdon

Tim Oh.

Selsdon Beer? In the wardrobe?

Lloyd No, Selsdon. Tim, you need a break. Why don't you sit down quietly upstairs and do all the company's VAT?

Tim VAT, right.

Lloyd (*discreetly*) And Tim – just in case he and the gear *do* walk off together one night, order yourself a spare Burglar costume.

Tim Spare Burglar costume.

Lloyd Two spare Burglar costumes. One to fit you, one to fit Poppy. I want a plentiful supply of spare Burglars on hand for any eventuality.

Tim Two spare Burglars.

Exit Tim into the wings.

Belinda He has been on his feet for forty-eight hours, Lloyd.

Lloyd (*calling*) Don't fall down, Tim. We may not be insured.

Selsdon So what's next on the bill?

Lloyd Well, Selsdon, I thought we might try a spot of rehearsal.

Selsdon Oh, I won't, thank you.

Lloyd You *won't*?

Selsdon You all go ahead. I'll sit and watch you. This is the beer in the wardrobe, is it?

Belinda No, my sweet, he wants us to rehearse.

Selsdon Yes, but I think we've got to rehearse, haven't we?

Lloyd Rehearse, yes! Well done, Selsdon. I knew you'd think of something. Right, from Belinda and Freddie's entrance ...

Enter Poppy from the wings, alarmed.

Poppy Lloyd ...

Lloyd What? What's happened now?

Poppy The police!

Lloyd The *police*?

Poppy They've found an old man. He was lying unconscious in a doorway just across the street.

Lloyd Oh. Yes. Thank you.

Poppy They say he's very dirty and rather smelly, and I thought oh my God, because ...

Lloyd Thank you, Poppy.

Poppy Because when you get close to Selsdon ...

Belinda Poppy!

Poppy No, I mean, if you stand anywhere near Selsdon you can't help noticing this very distinctive... (*She stops, sniffing*)

Selsdon (*putting his arm round her*) I'll tell you something, Poppy. Once you've got it in your nostrils you never forget it. Sixty years now and the smell of the theatre still haunts me.

Exit Selsdon into the study.

Belinda Oh, bless him!

Lloyd Tell me, Poppy, love – how did you get a job like this, that requires tact and understanding? You're not somebody's girlfriend, are you?

Poppy *gives him a startled look.*

Belinda Don't worry, Poppy, my sweet. He truly did not hear.

Enter Selsdon from the study.

Selsdon Not here?

Lloyd Yes, yes, there!

Belinda Sit down, my precious.

Dotty Go back to sleep.

Lloyd You're not on for another twenty pages yet.

Exit Selsdon into the study. Exit Poppy into the wings.

Lloyd And on we go.

He goes back down into the auditorium.

Dotty in the kitchen, wildly roasting sardines. Freddie and Belinda waiting impatiently outside the front door. Garry and Brooke disappearing tremulously into the bedroom. Time sliding irrevocably into the past.

Exeunt Dotty into the service quarters, Garry and Brooke upstairs into the bedroom, and Frederick through the front door.

Belinda (*to Lloyd, with lowered voice*) Aren't they sweet?

Lloyd What?

Belinda (*points to the bedroom and the service quarters*) Garry and Dotty.

Lloyd Garry and Dotty?

Belinda Sh!

Lloyd (*lowers his voice*) What? You mean they're an item? Those two? Tramplemain and Mrs Clackett?

Belinda It's supposed to be a secret.

Lloyd But she's old enough to be ...

Belinda Sh! Didn't you know?

Lloyd I'm just God, Belinda, love. I'm just the one with the English degree, I don't know anything.

Enter Garry from the bedroom.

Garry What's happening?

Lloyd I don't like to imagine, Garry, honey.

Exit Belinda through the front door.

Garry I mean, what are we waiting for?

Enter Dotty from the service quarters, inquiringly.

Lloyd I don't know what you're waiting for, Garry. Her sixteenth birthday?

Garry What?

Lloyd Or maybe just the cue. Brooke!

Exit Dotty to the service quarters.

Enter Brooke from the bedroom.

Lloyd 'Oh, you're in a real state.'

Vicki Oh, you're in a real state! You can't even get the door open.

Lloyd Door closed, love.

Garry *closes the door.*

Vicki You can't even get the door open.

Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the bedroom.

Enter Philip through the front door.

Philip No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember.

Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Roger's.

Philip We've got the place entirely to ourselves.

Philip *closes the door.*

Flavia Home!

Philip Home, sweet home!

Flavia Dear old house!

Philip Just waiting for us to come back!

Flavia It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!

Philip It's damned serious! If Inland Revenue find out we're in the country, even for one night, bang goes our claim to be resident abroad. Bang goes most of this year's income. I feel like an illegal immigrant.

Flavia I'll tell you what I feel like.

Philip Champagne? *(He takes a bottle out of the box)*

Flavia I wonder if Mrs Clackett's aired the beds.

Philip Darling!

Flavia Well, why not? No children. No friends dropping in. We're absolutely on our own.

Philip True. *(He picks up the bag and box, and ushers Flavia towards the stairs)* There is something to be said for being a tax exile.

Flavia Leave those!

He drops the bag and box, and kisses her. She flees upstairs, laughing, and he after her.

Philip Sh!

Flavia What?

Philip *(humorously)* Inland Revenue may hear us!

They creep to the bedroom door.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, carrying a fresh plate of sardines.

Mrs Clackett *(to herself)* What I did with that first lot of sardines I shall never know.

She puts the sardines on the telephone table and sits on the sofa.

Philip and Flavia *(looking down from the gallery)* Mrs Clackett!

Mrs Clackett *jumps up.*

Mrs Clackett Oh, you give me a turn! My heart jumped right out of my boots!

Philip So did mine!

Flavia We thought you'd gone!

Mrs Clackett I thought you was in Spain!

Philip We are! We are!

Flavia You haven't seen us!

Philip We're not here!

Mrs Clackett Oh, like that, is it? The income tax are after you?

Flavia They would be, if they knew we were here.

Mrs Clackett All right, then, love. You're not here. I haven't seen you. Anybody asks for you, I don't know nothing. Off to bed, are you?

Philip Oh ...

Flavia Well ...

Mrs Clackett That's right. Nowhere like bed when they all

get on top of you. You'll want your things, look. (*She indicates the bag and box*)

Philip Oh. Yes. Thanks.

He comes downstairs, and picks up the bag and box.

Mrs Clackett (*to Flavia*) Oh, and that bed hasn't been aired, love.

Flavia I'll get a hot-water bottle.

Exit Flavia into the mezzanine bathroom.

Mrs Clackett I've put all your letters in the study, dear.

Philip Letters? What letters? You forward all the mail, don't you?

Mrs Clackett Not the ones from the income tax, dear. I don't want to spoil your holidays.

Philip Oh, good heavens! Where are they?

Mrs Clackett I've put them all in the pigeonhouse.

Philip In the *pigeonhouse*?

Mrs Clackett In the little pigeonhouse in your desk, love.

Exeunt Mrs Clackett and Philip into the study. Philip is still holding the bag and box.

Only he remains on and Dotty remains in the doorway waiting for him.

Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie.

Roger Yes, but I could hear voices!

Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear.

Vicki Voices? What sort of voices?

Lloyd Hold it. Freddie, what's the trouble?

Frederick Lloyd, you know how stupid I am about moves. Sorry, Garry ... Sorry, Brooke ... It's just my usual dimness. *(To Lloyd.)* But why do I take the things off into the study? Wouldn't it be more natural if I left them on?

Lloyd No.

Frederick I thought it might be somehow more logical.

Lloyd No.

Frederick Lloyd, I know it's a bit late in the day to go into all this...

Lloyd Freddie, we've got several more minutes left before we open.

Enter Belinda from the mezzanine bathroom, to wait patiently.

Frederick Thank you, Lloyd. As long as we're not too pushed. But I've never understood why he carries an overnight bag and a box of groceries into the study to look at his mail.

Garry Because they have to be out of the way for my next scene!

Frederick I see that.

Belinda And Freddie, my sweet, Selsdon needs them in the study for *his* scene.

Frederick I see that ...

Lloyd *(comes up on stage)* Selsdon ... where is he? Is he there?

Belinda *(calling, urgently)* Selsdon!

Dotty *(likewise)* Selsdon!

Garry *(likewise)* Selsdon!

A pane of glass shatters in the mullion window, and an arm comes through and releases the catch. Enter an elderly Burglar.

He has

great character, but is in need of extensive repair and modernisation.

Burglar No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement ...

He becomes aware of the others.

Selsdon No?

Lloyd No. Not yet. Thank you, Selsdon.

Selsdon I thought I heard my name.

Lloyd No, no, no. Back to sleep, Selsdon. Another ten pages before the big moment.

Selsdon I'm so sorry.

Lloyd Not at all. Nice to see you. Poppy, put the glass back in the window.

Enter Poppy. She puts the glass back.

Lloyd And, Selsdon ...

Selsdon Yes?

Lloyd Beautiful performance.

Selsdon Oh, how kind of you. I don't think I'm quite there yet, though.

Exit Selsdon through the window.

Lloyd He even remembered the line.

Frederick All right, I see all that.

Lloyd (*faintly*) Oh, no!

Frederick I just don't know why I take them.

Lloyd *comes up on stage.*

Lloyd Freddie, love, why does anyone do anything? Why does that other idiot walk out through the front door holding two plates of sardines? (*To Garry.*) I'm not getting at you, love.

Garry Of course not, love. (*To Frederick.*) I mean, why do I? (*To Lloyd.*) I mean, right, when you come to think about it, why *do* I?

Lloyd Who knows? The wellsprings of human action are deep and cloudy. (*To Frederick.*) Maybe something happened to you as a very small child which made you frightened to let go of groceries.

Belinda Or it could be genetic.

Garry Yes, or it could be, you know.

Lloyd It could well be.

Frederick Of course. Thank you. I understand all that. But ...

Lloyd Freddie, love, I'm telling you – I don't know. I don't think

the author knows. I don't know why the author came into this industry in the first place. I don't know why any of us came into it.

Frederick All the same, if you could just give me a reason I could keep in my mind ...

Lloyd All right, I'll give you a reason. You carry those groceries into the study, Freddie, honey, because it's just slightly after midnight, and we're not going to be finished before we open tomorrow night. Correction – before we open *tonight*.

Frederick *nods, rebuked, and exits into the study.* **Dotty** *silently follows him.* **Garry and Brooke** *go silently back into the bedroom.*

Lloyd *returns to the stalls.*

Lloyd And on we go. From after Freddie's exit, *with* the groceries.

Belinda *(keeping her voice down)* Lloyd, sweetheart, his wife left him this morning.

Lloyd Oh. *(Pause)* Freddie!

Enter Frederick , still wounded, from the study.

Lloyd I think the point is that you've had a great fright when she mentions income tax, and you feel very insecure and exposed, and you want something familiar to hold on to.

Frederick *(with humble gratitude)* Thank you, Lloyd. *(He clutches the groceries to his chest)* That's most helpful.

Exit Frederick into the study.

Belinda *(to Lloyd)* Bless you, my sweet.

Lloyd *(leaves the stage)* And on we merrily go.

Exit Belinda into the mezzanine bathroom.

Lloyd 'Yes, but I could hear voices ...'

Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie.

Roger Yes, but I could hear voices!

Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear.

Vicki Voices? What sort of voices?

Roger People's voices.

Vicki But there's no one here.

Roger Darling, I saw the door handle move! It could be someone from the office, checking up.

Vicki I still don't see why you've got to put your tie on to look.

Roger Mrs Crackett.

Vicki Mrs Crackett?

Roger One has to set an example to the staff

Vicki (*looks over the bannisters*) Oh, look, she's opened our sardines.

She moves to go downstairs. Roger grabs her.

Roger Come back!

Vicki What?

Roger I'll fetch them! You can't go downstairs like that.

Vicki Why not?

Roger Mrs Crackett.

Vicki Mrs Crackett?

Roger One has certain obligations.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the study. She is carrying the first plate of sardines.

Mrs Clackett (*to herself*) Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like a Sunday school outing.

Roger *pushes Vicki through the first available door, which happens to be the linen cupboard.*

Mrs Clackett Oh, you're still poking around, are you?

Roger Yes, still poking ... well, still around.

Mrs Clackett In the airing cupboard, were you?

Roger No, no.

The linen cupboard door begins to open. He slams it shut.

Well, just checking the sheets and pillowcases. Going through the inventory.

He starts downstairs.

Mrs Blackett ...

Mrs Clackett Clackett, dear, Clackett.

She puts down the sardines beside the other sardines.

Roger Mrs Clackett. Is there anyone else in the house, Mrs Clackett?

Mrs Clackett I haven't seen no one, dear.

Roger I thought I heard voices.

Mrs Clackett Voices? There's no voices here, love.

Roger I must have imagined it.

Philip (off) Oh, good Lord above!

Roger , with his back to her, picks up both plates of sardines.

Roger I beg your pardon?

Mrs Clackett Oh, good Lord above, the study door's open.

She crosses and closes it. Roger looks out of the window.

Roger There's another car outside! That's not Mr Hackham's, is it? Or Mr Dudley's?

Exit Roger through the front door, holding both plates of sardines.

*Enter **Flavia** from the mezzanine bathroom, carrying a hot water bottle. She sees the linen cupboard door swinging open as she passes, pushes it shut and turns the key.*

Flavia Nothing but flapping doors in this house.

*Exit **Flavia** into the bedroom.*

*Enter from the study **Philip** , holding a tax demand and its envelope.*

Philip ‘... final notice ... steps will be taken ... distraint ... proceedings in court ...’

Mrs Clackett Oh yes, and that reminds me, a gentleman come about the house.

Philip Don’t tell me. I’m not here.

Mrs Clackett He says he’s got a lady quite aroused.

Philip Leave everything to Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

Mrs Clackett All right, love. I’ll let them go all over, shall I?

Philip Let them do anything. Just so long as you don’t tell anyone we’re here.

Mrs Clackett So I’ll just sit down and turn on the ... sardines, I’ve forgotten the sardines! I don’t know – if it wasn’t fixed to my shoulders I’d forget what day it was.

*Exit **Mrs Clackett** to the service quarters.*

Philip I didn’t get this! I’m not here. I’m in Spain. But if I didn’t get it I didn’t open it.

*Enter **Flavia** from the bedroom. She is holding the dress that **Vicki** arrived in.*

Flavia Darling, I never had a dress like this, did I?

Philip (*abstracted*) Didn't you?

Flavia I shouldn't buy anything as tarty as this ... Oh, it's not something you gave me, is it?

Philip I should never have touched it.

Flavia No, it's lovely.

Philip Stick it down. Put it back. Never saw it.

Exit Philip into study.

Flavia Well, I'll put it in the attic, with all the other things you gave me that are too precious to wear.

Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor.

Enter Roger through the front door, still carrying both plates of sardines.

Roger All right, all right ... Now the study door's open again! What's going on?

He puts the sardines down – one plate on the telephone table, where it was before, one near the front door – and goes towards the study, but stops at the sound of urgent knocking overhead.

Knocking!

Knocking.

Upstairs!

He runs upstairs. Knocking.

Oh my God, there's something in the airing cupboard!

He unlocks it and opens it. Enter Vicki.

Roger Oh, it's you.

Vicki Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark!
With all black sheets and things!

Roger But, darling, why did you lock the door?

Vicki Why did *I* lock the door? Why did *you* lock the door!

Roger I didn't lock the door!

Vicki *Someone* locked the door!

Roger Anyway, we can't stand here like this.

Vicki Like what?

Roger In your underwear.

Vicki OK, I'll take it off.

Roger In here, in here!

He ushers her into the bedroom.

*Only she remains on, blinking anxiously and peering about the floor.
Garry waits for her, holding the bedroom door open.*

Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope, and a tube of glue.

Philip Darling, this glue. Is it the sort you can never get unstuck ... ?

Lloyd Hold it.

Philip Oh, Mrs Clackett's made us some sardines.

Lloyd Hold it. We have a problem.

Frederick (to Brooke) Oh, bad luck! Which one is it this time?

Brooke Left.

Garry (calling to people, off) It's the left one, everybody!

Omnes (off) Left one!

Enter Dotty, Belinda, and Poppy.

Frederick It could be anywhere.

Garry (*looks over the edge of the gallery*) It could have gone over the thing and fallen down, you know, and then bounced somewhere else again.

Brooke *comes downstairs. They all search hopelessly.*

Poppy Where did you last see it?

Belinda She *didn't* see it, poor sweet! It was in her eye!

Garry (*coming downstairs*) It was probably on 'Why did I lock the door?' She opens her eyes very sort of, you know. Don't you, my sweet? I always feel I ought to rush forward and -

He rushes forward, hands held out.

Dotty Mind where you put your feet, my love.

Frederick Yes, everyone look under their feet.

Garry No one move their feet.

Belinda Everyone put their feet back exactly where they were.

Frederick Pick your feet up one by one.

They all trample about, looking under their feet, except Brooke, who crouches with her good eye at floor level. Lloyd comes up on stage.

Lloyd Brooke, love, is this going to happen during a performance? We don't want the audience to miss their last buses and trains.

Belinda She'll just carry on. Won't you, my love?

Frederick But can she see anything without them?

Lloyd Can she hear anything without them?

Brooke (*suddenly realising that she is being addressed*) Sorry?

She straightens up sharply. Her head comes into abrupt contact with Poppy's face.

Poppy Ugh!

Brooke Oh. Sorry.

Brooke *jumps up to see what damage she has done to Poppy, and steps backward on to Garry's hand.*

Garry Ugh!

Brooke Sorry.

Dotty *hurries to his aid.*

Dotty Oh my poor darling! (*To Brooke.*) You stood on his hand!

Frederick Oh dear. (*He hurriedly clasps a handkerchief to his nose*)

Belinda Oh, look at Freddie, the poor love!

Lloyd What's the matter with *him*?

Belinda He's just got a little nosebleed, my sweet.

Lloyd A nosebleed? No one touched him!

Belinda No, he's got a thing about violence. It always makes his nose bleed.

Frederick (*from behind his handkerchief*) I'm so sorry.

Lloyd Brooke, sweetheart...

Brooke I thought you said something to me.

Lloyd Yes. (*He picks up a vase and hands it to her.*) Just go and hit the box-office manager with this and you'll have finished off live theatre in Weston-super-Mare.

Brooke Anyway, I've found it.

Belinda She's found it!

Dotty Where was it, love?

Brooke In my eye.

Garry In her eye!

Belinda (*hugging her*) Well done, my sweet.

Lloyd Not in your left eye?

Brooke It had gone round the side.

Belinda I knew it hadn't gone far. Are you all right, Poppy, my sweet?

Poppy I think so.

Belinda Freddie?

Frederick Fine, fine. (*He gets to his feet, looks in his handkerchief, and has to sit down again*) I'm so sorry.

Lloyd Now what?

Belinda He's just feeling a little faint, my love. He's got this thing about ... (*She tries to demonstrate*)

Lloyd This thing about what?

Belinda Well, I won't say the word.

Frederick *gets to his feet.*

Lloyd You mean blood?

Frederick Oh dear. *(He has to sit down again)*

Belinda *(to Frederick)* We all understand, my precious.

Lloyd All right, clear the stage. Walking wounded carry the stretcher cases.

Lloyd *returns to the stalls, Dotty to the service quarters, Poppy to the wings. Garry and Brooke go upstairs. Belinda helps Frederick to his feet.*

Lloyd Right, then. On we bloodily stagger.

Frederick *has to reach for a chair again.*

Lloyd Oh, sorry, Freddie. Let me rephrase that. On we blindly stumble. Brooke, I withdraw that.

Exit Belinda along the upstairs corridor, Frederick into study.

Lloyd From your exit, anyway. ‘OK, I’ll take it off ... In here, in here.’ Where’s Selsdon?

Garry Selsdon!

Lloyd Selsdon!

Enter Selsdon through the front door.

Selsdon I think she might have dropped it out here somewhere.

Lloyd Good. Keep looking. Only another five pages, Selsdon.

Exit Selsdon through the front door.

Lloyd ‘Anyway, we can’t stand here like this. – Like what?. – In your underwear. – OK, I’ll take it off

Roger In here, in here!

He ushers her into the bedroom.

Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope and a tube of glue.

Philip Darling, this glue. Is it the sort you can never get unstuck ... ? Oh, Mrs Clackett’s made us some sardines.

Exit Philip into the study with the tax demand, envelope, glue

and one of the plates of sardines from the telephone table.

*Enter **Roger** from the bedroom, holding the hot water bottle. He looks up and down the landing.*

*Enter **Vicki** from the bedroom.*

Vicki Now what?

Roger A hot-water bottle! I didn't put it there!

Vicki I didn't put it there.

Roger Someone in the bathroom, filling hot-water bottles.

*Exit **Roger** into the mezzanine bathroom.*

Vicki (*anxious*) You don't think there's something creepy going on?

*Exit **Vicki** into the mezzanine bathroom.*

*Enter **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor.*

Flavia Darling, are you coming to bed or aren't you?

*Exit **Flavia** into the bedroom.*

Roger What did you say?

Vicki I didn't say anything.

Roger I mean, first the door handle. Now the hot-water bottle ...

Vicki I can feel goose pimples all over.

Roger Yes, quick, get something round you.

Vicki Get the covers over our heads.

Roger *is about to open the bedroom door.*

Roger Just a moment. What did I do with those sardines?

He goes downstairs. Vicki makes to follow.

Roger You – wait here.

Vicki (*uneasily*) You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.

Roger Yes, but this one has been extensively modernised throughout. I can't see how anything creepy would survive oil-fired central heating and ...

Vicki What? What is it?

Roger *stares at the telephone table in silence.*

The bedroom door opens, and Flavia puts Roger's flight bag on the table outside without looking round. The door closes again.

Vicki What's happening?

Roger The sardines. They've gone.

Vicki Perhaps there is something funny going on. I'm going to get into bed and put my head under the ...

She freezes at the sight of the flight bag.

Roger I put them there. Or was it *there*?

Vicki Bag ...

Vicki *runs down the stairs to Roger, who is directly underneath the gallery.*

Roger I suppose Mrs Sprockett must have taken them away again ... What? What is it?

Vicki Bag!

Roger Bag?

Vicki Bag! Bag!

Vicki drags **Roger** silently back towards the stairs.

*Enter **Flavia** from the bedroom with the box of files. She picks up the flight bag as well and takes them both off along the upstairs corridor.*

Roger What do you mean, bag, bag?

Vicki Bag! Bag! Bag!

Roger What bag?

Vicki sees the empty table outside the bedroom door.

Vicki No bag!

Roger No bag?

Vicki Your bag! Suddenly! Here! Now – gone!

Roger It's in the bedroom. I put it in the bedroom.

*Exit **Roger** into the bedroom.*

Vicki Don't go in there!

*Enter **Roger** from the bedroom.*

Roger The box!

Vicki The box!

Roger They've both gone!

Vicki Oh! My files!

Roger What on earth's happening? Where's Mrs Spratchett?

*He starts downstairs. **Vicki** follows him.*

Roger You wait in the bedroom.

Vicki No! No! No! *She runs downstairs.*

Roger At least put your dress on!

Vicki I'm not going in there!

Roger I'll fetch it for you, I'll fetch it for you!

Exit Roger into the bedroom.

Vicki Yes, quick – let's get out of here!

Enter Roger from the bedroom.

Roger Your dress has gone.

Vicki I'm never going to see Basingstoke again!

Roger *goes downstairs.*

Roger Don't panic! Don't panic! There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this. I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening. You wait here ... You can't stand here looking like that ... Wait in the study ... Study, study, study!

Exit Roger into the service quarters.

Vicki *opens the study door. There's a roar of exasperation from Philip , off. She turns and flees.*

Vicki Roger! There's a strange figure in there! Where are you?

There is another cry from Philip , off.

Exit Vicki blindly through the front door.

Enter Philip from the study. He is holding the tax demand in his right hand and one of the plates of sardines in his left.

Philip Darling, I know this is going to sound silly, but ...

He struggles to get the tax demand unstuck from his fingers, encumbered by the plate of sardines.

Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying various pieces of bric-a-brac.

Flavia Darling, if we're not going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic.

Philip I can't come to bed! I'm glued to a tax demand!

Flavia Darling, why don't you put the sardines down?

Philip *puts the plate of sardines down on the table. But when he takes his hand away the sardines come with it.*

Philip Darling, I'm stuck to the sardines!

Flavia Darling, don't play the fool. Get that bottle marked poison in the downstairs loo. That eats through anything.

Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor.

Philip *(flapping the tax demand)* I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.

Exit Philip into the downstairs bathroom.

Pause.

Lloyd Selsdon ... ? You're on, Selsdon. We're there. The moment's arrived ...

Belinda *(off)* It's all right, love. He's coming, he's coming ...

Lloyd But his arm should be coming through that window even before Freddie's off!

A pane of glass shatters in the mullion window and an arm comes through and releases the catch.

Lloyd Ah. And here it is.

The window opens and through it appears an elderly Burglar. He has great character, but is in need of extensive repair and modernisation.

Burglar No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

He climbs in.

Lloyd All right, Selsdon, hold it. Let's take it again.

Burglar No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults!

Lloyd Hold it, Selsdon. Hold it!

Burglar What am I doing now?

Lloyd *Hold it!*

Enter Poppy from the wings.

Burglar I'm breaking into paper bags!

Poppy Lloyd wants you to hold it.

Enter Belinda.

Burglar Right, what are they offering ... ?

Belinda Stop, Selsdon, my love! Wait, my precious!

Selsdon *stops, restrained at last by Belinda's hand on his arm.*

Lloyd It's like Myra Hess playing on through the air raids.

Selsdon Stop?

Poppy Stop.

Belinda Stop.

Lloyd Thank you, Belinda. Thank you, Poppy.

Exeunt Belinda and Poppy.

Lloyd Selsdon ...

Selsdon I met Myra Hess once.

Lloyd I think he can hear better than I can.

Selsdon I beg your pardon?

Lloyd From your entrance, please, Selsdon.

Selsdon Well, it was during the war, at a charity show in Sunderland ...

Lloyd Thank you! Poppy!

Selsdon Oh, not for me. It stops me sleeping.

Enter Poppy from the wings.

Lloyd Put the glass back once more.

Selsdon Come on again?

Lloyd Right. Only, Selsdon ...

Selsdon Yes?

Lloyd A little sooner, Selsdon. A shade earlier. A touch closer to yesterday. All right? Freddie!

Enter Frederick.

Lloyd (to **Selsdon**) Start moving as soon as Freddie opens the door. (To **Frederick**.) What's the line?

Frederick 'I've heard of people getting *stuck* with a problem, but this is ridiculous.'

Lloyd Start moving as soon as you hear the line, 'I've heard of people getting stuck with a *problem* ...'

Frederick 'Stuck with a *problem*'?

Lloyd 'Stuck with *a, problem*, but this is ridiculous.' And I want your arm through that window. Right?

Selsdon Say no more. May I make a suggestion, though? Should I perhaps come on a little earlier?

Lloyd Selsdon ...

Selsdon Only there does seem to be something of a hiatus between Freddie's exit and my entrance.

Lloyd No, Selsdon. Listen. Don't worry. I've got it.

Selsdon Yes?

Lloyd How about coming on a little earlier?

Selsdon We're obviously thinking along the same lines.

Exit Selsdon through the window.

Lloyd Am I putting him on or is he putting me on? Right, Freddie, from your exit.

Philip (*flapping the tax demand*) I've heard of people getting stuck with *a, problem*, but this is ridiculous.

Exit Philip into downstairs bathroom.

Enter Burglar as before, but on time.

Burglar No bars, no burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

He climbs in.

No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags! So what are they offering? *(He peers at the television)* One microwave oven.

He unplugs it and puts it on the sofa.

What? Fifty quid? Hardly worth lifting it.

He inspects the paintings and ornaments.

Junk ... Junk ... If you insist ...

He pockets some small item.

Where's his desk? No, they all say the same thing ... They all say the same thing ...

Selsdon Yes? Line?

Poppy *(off)* 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

Selsdon What?

Lloyd *(wearily)* 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

Seldon Hard to what?

Others *(variously, off)* 'Adjust to retirement.'

Selsdon It's also very hard to hear if everyone talks at once.

Exit Burglar into the study.

Enter Roger from the service quarters, followed by Mrs Clackett, who is holding another plate of sardines.

Roger ... And the prospective tenant naturally wishes to know if there is any previous history of paranormal phenomena.

Mrs Clackett Oh, yes, dear, it's all nice and paranormal.

Roger I mean, has anything ever dematerialised before? Has anything ever ... ?

He sees the television set on the sofa.

... flown about?

Mrs Clackett *puts the sardines down on the telephone table, moves the television set back and closes the front door.*

Mrs Clackett Flown about? No, the things move themselves on their own two feet, just like they do in any house.

Roger I'd better warn the prospective tenant. She is inspecting the study.

He opens the study door and then closes it again.

There's a man in there!

Mrs Clackett No, no, there's no one in the house, love.

Roger *(opening the study door)* Look! Look! He's ... *searching for something.*

Mrs Clackett *(glancing briefly)* I can't see no one.

Roger You can't see him? But this is extraordinary! And where is my prospective tenant? I left her in there! She's gone! My prospective tenant has disappeared!

He closes the study door and looks round the living-room. He sees the sardines on the telephone table.

Oh my God.

Mrs Clackett Now what?

Roger There!

Mrs Clackett Where?

Roger The sardines!

Mrs Clackett Oh, the sardines.

Roger You can see the sardines?

Mrs Clackett I can see the sardines.

Roger touches them cautiously, then picks up the plate.

Mrs Clackett I can see the way they're going, too.

Roger I'm not letting these sardines out of my hand. But where is my prospective tenant?

He goes upstairs, holding the sardines.

Mrs Clackett I'm going to be opening sardines all night, in and out of here like a cuckoo on a clock.

Exit Mrs Clackett into the service quarters.

Roger Vicki! Vicki!

Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom.

Enter Burglar from the study, carrying an armful of silver cups, etc.

Burglar No, I miss the violence. I miss having other human beings around to terrify ...

He dumps the silverware on the sofa and exits into the study.

Enter Roger from mezzanine bathroom.

Roger Where's she gone? Vicki?

*Exit **Roger** into the bedroom.*

*Enter **Burglar** from the study, carrying **Philip** 's box and bag. He empties the contents of the box out behind the sofa, and loads the silverware into the box.*

Burglar It's nice to hear a bit of shouting and screaming around you. All this silence gets you down ...

*Enter **Roger** from the linen cupboard, still holding the sardines.*

Roger (calls) Vicki! Vicki!

*Exit **Roger** into the linen cupboard.*

Burglar I'm going to end up talking to myself ...

*Exit the **Burglar** into study, unaware of **Roger**.*

*Enter **Philip** from the downstairs bathroom. His right hand is still stuck to the tax demand, his left to the plate of sardines.*

Philip Darling, this stuff that eats through anything. It eats through *trousers!*

He examines holes burnt in the front of them.

Darling, if it eats through trousers, you don't think it goes on and eats through ... Listen, darling, I think I'd better get these trousers off! (*He begins to do so, as best he can.*) Darling, quick, this is an emergency! I mean, if it eats through absolutely anything ... Darling, I think I can feel it! I think it's eating through ... absolutely everything!

*Enter **Roger** from the bedroom, still holding the sardines.*

Roger There's something evil in this house.

Philip *pulls up his trousers.*

Philip (*aside*) The Inland Revenue!

Roger (*sees Philip , frightened*) He's back!

Philip No!

Roger No?

Philip I'm not here.

Roger He's not there!

Philip I'm abroad.

Roger He's walking abroad.

Philip I must go.

Roger Stay!

Philip I won't, thank you.

Roger Speak!

Philip Only in the presence of my lawyer.

Roger Only in the presence of your ... ? Hold on. You're not from the other world!

Philip Yes, yes – Marbella!

Roger You're some kind of intruder!

Philip Well, nice to meet you.

He waves goodbye with his right hand, then sees the tax demand on it and hurriedly puts it away behind his back.

I mean, have a sardine.

He offers the sardines on his left hand. His trousers, unsupported, fall down.

Roger No, you're not! You're some kind of sex maniac! You've done something to Vicki! I'm going to come straight

downstairs ... !

Roger *comes downstairs and dials 999.*

Philip Oh, you've got some sardines. Well, if there's nothing I can offer you ...

Roger This is plainly a matter for the police! *(Into the phone)*
Police!

Philip ... I think I'll be running along.

He runs, his trousers still round his ankles, out through the front door.

Roger Come back ... ! *(Into the phone.)* Hello – police? Someone has broken into my house! Or rather someone has broken into someone's house ... No, but he's a sex maniac! I left a young woman here and what's happened to her no one knows!

Enter Vicki through the window.

Vicki There's a man lurking in the undergrowth!

Roger *(into the phone)* Sorry ... the young woman has reappeared. *(Hand over phone)* Are you all right?

Vicki No, he almost saw me!

Roger *(into the phone)* He almost saw her ... Yes, but he's a burglar as well! He's taken our things!

Vicki *(finds Philip's bag and box)* The things are here.

Roger *(into the phone)* The things have come back. So we're just missing a plate of sardines.

Vicki *(finding the sardines left near the front door by Roger)* Here are the sardines.

Roger *(into the phone)* And we've found the sardines.

Vicki This is the police? You want the police here? In my underwear?

Roger *(into the phone)* So what am I saying? I'm saying, let's say no more about it. *(He puts the phone down)* I thought something terrible had happened to you!

Vicki It has! I know him!

Roger You know him?

Vicki He's dealt with by our office!

Roger He's just an ordinary sex maniac.

Vicki Yes, but he mustn't see me like this! You have to keep up certain standards if you work for Inland Revenue!

Roger Well, put something on!

Vicki I haven't got anything!

Roger There must be something in the bathroom!

He picks up the box and bag, and leads the way.

Bring the sardines!

She picks up the sardines. Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the downstairs bathroom.

Enter the Burglar from the study and dumps more booty.

Burglar Right, that's downstairs tidied up a bit. *(He starts upstairs)* Just give the upstairs a quick going-over for them.

Exit the Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom.

Enter Vicki , holding the sardines and a white bathmat, and Roger , carrying the box and bag, from the downstairs

bathroom.

Vicki *A bathmat?*

Roger Better than nothing!

Vicki I can't go around in front of our taxpayers wearing a *bathmat!*

Roger The bedroom, then! There must be something in the bedroom!

He leads the way upstairs.

Vicki No, no, no, no! I'm not going in that bedroom again!

Roger *I'll look in the bedroom. You look in the other bathroom.*

Exit Roger into the bedroom and Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom.

Enter Philip through the front door.

Philip Darling! Help! Where are you?

Enter Vicki from the mezzanine bathroom.

Vicki Roger! Roger!

Exit Philip hurriedly, unseen by Vicki , into the downstairs bathroom.

Vicki There's someone in the bathroom now!

Vicki *runs towards the bedrooms, then stops.*

Flavia *(off)* Oh, darling, I'm finding such lovely things ... !

Vicki *turns and runs downstairs instead, as Flavia enters along the upstairs corridor, absorbed in the china tea service she is carrying.*

Vicki *exits hurriedly into the downstairs bathroom.*

Flavia Do you remember this china tea service -

Vicki *screams, off.*

Flavia – that you gave me on the very first anniversary of our ... ?

Enter Vicki from the downstairs bathroom. She stops at the sight of Flavia.

Flavia Who are you?

Vicki Oh, *no* – it's his wife and dependents! *(She puts her hands over her face)*

Enter Philip from the downstairs bathroom, still with his hands encumbered, holding the bathmat now as well, and keeping his trousers up with his elbows.

Philip Excuse me, I think you've dropped your dress!

Flavia *gasps.* **Philip** *looks up at the gallery and sees her.*

Philip *(to Flavia)* Where have you been? I've been going mad! Look at the state I'm in!

He holds up his hands to show Flavia the state he is in and his trousers fall down. The tea service slips from Flavia's horrified hands, and rains down on the floor of the living-room below.

Philip *hurries towards the stairs, trousers round his ankles, his hands extended in supplication.*

Darling, honestly!

Vicki *flees before him, comes face to face with Flavia, and takes refuge in the linen cupboard.*

Philip She just burst into the room and her dress fell off!

*Exit **Flavia** , with a cry of pain, along the upstairs corridor.*

*Enter **Roger** from the bedroom, directly in **Philip** 's path.*

***Philip** holds up the bathmat in front of his face. He is invisible to*

***Roger** , though, because the latter is holding up a white bedsheet.*

***Roger** Here, put this sheet on for the moment while I see if there's something in the attic.*

***Roger** leaves **Philip** with the sheet and exits along upstairs corridor.*

***Philip** turns to go back downstairs.*

*Enter **Burglar** from the mezzanine bathroom, holding two gold taps.*

***Burglar** One pair gold taps ... (He stops at the sight of **Philip**.) Oh, my Gawd!*

***Philip** Who are you?*

***Burglar** Me? Fixing the taps.*

***Philip** Tax? Income tax?*

***Burglar** That's right, governor. In come new taps ... out go old taps.*

*Exit **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom.*

***Philip** Tax-inspectors everywhere!*

***Roger** (off) Here you are!*

***Philip** The other one!*

*Exit **Philip** into the bedroom, holding the bathmat in front of his face.*

*Enter **Roger** along the upstairs corridor holding **Vicki** 's dress.*

Roger I've found your dress! It came flying out of the attic at me!

*Exit **Roger** into mezzanine bathroom.*

*Enter **Philip** from the bedroom, trying to pull the bathmat off his head.*

Philip Darling! I've got her dress stuck to my head now!

*Enter **Roger** from the mezzanine bathroom.*

*Exit **Philip** into the bedroom.*

Roger Another intruder!

*Enter the **Burglar** from the mezzanine bathroom.*

Burglar Just doing the taps, governor.

Roger Attacks? Not attacks on women?

Burglar Try anything, governor, but I'll do the taps on the bath first.

*Exit **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom.*

Roger Sex maniacs everywhere! Where is Vicki? Vicki... ?

*Exit **Roger** into the downstairs bathroom.*

*Enter **Burglar** from the mezzanine bathroom, heading for the front door.*

Burglar People everywhere! I'm off. A tax on women? I don't know, they'll put a tax on anything these days.

*Enter **Roger** from the downstairs bathroom. The **Burglar** stops.*

Roger If I can't find her, you're going to be in trouble, you see.

Burglar WC? I'll fix it.

*Exit **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom again.*

Roger Vicki ... ?

*Exit **Roger** through the front door.*

*Enter **Philip** from the bedroom. The bathmat is still on his head, but is now arranged like a burnous, and he is wrapped in a white bedsheet.*

*Enter **Vicki** from the linen cupboard, enrobed from head to foot in a black bedsheet. They both quietly close the doors behind them.*

Vicki Roger!

Philip Darling!

They see each other and start back.

*Enter **Roger** through the front door.*

Roger Sheikh! I thought you were coming at four? And this is your charming wife? So you want to see over the house now, do you, Sheikh? Right. Well. Since you're upstairs already ...

Roger goes upstairs.

*Enter **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor, carrying a vase.*

Flavia Him and his floozie! I'll break this over their heads!

Roger ... let's start downstairs.

Roger, Philip and Vicki go downstairs.

Flavia Who are you? Who are these creatures?

Roger (to **Philip and Vicki**) I'm sorry about this. I don't know who she is. No connection with the house, I assure

you.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, with another plate of sardines. Roger advances to introduce her.

Roger Whereas this good lady with the sardines, on the other hand ...

Mrs Clackett No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines, 'cause this time I'm eating them.

Roger ... is fully occupied with her sardines, so perhaps the toilet facilities would be of more interest.

He ushers Philip and Vicki away from Mrs Clackett towards the mezzanine bathroom.

Flavia Mrs Clackett, who are these people?

Mrs Clackett Oh, we get them all the time, love. They're just Arab sheets.

Roger I'm sorry about this. *(He opens the door to the mezzanine bathroom)* But in here ...

Flavia Arab sheets?

Exit Flavia into the bedroom.

Roger In here we have ...

Enter the Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom.

Burglar Ballcocks, governor. Your ballcocks have gone.

Roger We have him.

Enter Flavia from the bedroom.

Flavia They're *Irish* sheets! Irish linen sheets off my own bed!

Mrs Clackett Oh, the thieving devils!

Roger In the *study*, however ...

Mrs Clackett You give me that sheet, you devil!

She seizes the nearest sheet, and it comes away in her hand to reveal Vicki.

Oh, and there she stands in her smalls, for all the world to see!

Roger It's you!

Flavia It's her!

Flavia *comes downstairs menacingly.*

Exit Philip discreetly into the study.

Burglar It's my little girl!

Vicki Dad!

Flavia *stops.*

Enter Philip from the study in amazement. (He is now played by a double – Tim.)

Burglar Our little Vicki, that ran away from home, I thought I'd never see again!

Mrs Clackett Well, would you believe it?

Vicki (to Burglar) What are you doing here like this?

Burglar What are *you* doing here like *that*?

Vicki Me? I'm taking our files on tax evasion to Inland Revenue in Basingstoke.

Philip /Tim Agh!

He collapses behind the sofa, clutching at his heart, unnoticed by

the others.

Flavia (*threateningly*) So where's my other sheet?

*Enter through the front door the most sought-after of all properties on the market today – a **Sheikh**. He is wearing Arab robes and bears a strong resemblance to **Philip** , since he is also played by **Frederick**.*

Sheikh Ah! A house of heavenly peace! I rent it!

Roger Hold on, hold on ... I know that face! (*Pulls the Sheikh's burnous aside to reveal his face*) He isn't a sheikh! He's that sex-maniac!

Flavia Yes – it's my husband!

Sheikh What?

They all fall upon him.

Frederick's trousers are revealed to be around his ankles.

Lloyd Trousers!

Mrs Clackett You take all the clean sheets! (*She tries to pull the robes off him*)

Sheikh What? What?

Lloyd Trousers! Trousers!

Vicki You snatch my bathmat! (*She tries to pull his burnous off him*)

Sheikh What? What? What?

Flavia You toss me aside like a broken china doll! (*She hits him*)

Lloyd And to cap it all you've got your trousers on!
*Everyone except **Selsdon** finally comes to a halt.*

Burglar And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke ...

Even Selsdon becomes aware that the action has ceased.

Selsdon Stop?

Belinda Stop, stop.

Lloyd *comes up on stage.*

Lloyd It's a question of authenticity, you see, Freddie. *Do* Arab potentates wear trousers under their robes? I don't know. Maybe they do. But not round their ankles, Freddie! Not round their ankles!

Frederick Sorry. It's just frightfully difficult doing a quick change without a dresser.

Lloyd Get Tim to help you. Tim! Where's Tim? Come on, Tim! Tim!

Tim, *wearing the sheet as Philip's double, gets to his feet and gazes blearily at Lloyd.*

Tim Sorry?

Lloyd Oh, yes. You're acting.

Tim I must have dropped off down there.

Lloyd Never mind, Tim.

Tim Do something?

Lloyd No, let it pass. We'll just struggle through on our own. Tim has a sleep behind the sofa, while all the rest of us run round with our trousers round our ankles. OK, Freddie? You'll just have to do the best you can. On we go, then ...

Frederick *hesitates.*

Lloyd Some other problem, Freddie?

Frederick Well, since we're stopped anyway.

Lloyd Why did I ask?

Frederick I mean, you know how stupid I am about plot.

Lloyd I know, Freddie.

Frederick May I ask another silly question?

Lloyd All my studies in world drama lie at your disposal.

Frederick I still don't understand why the Sheikh just happens to be Philip's double.

Garry Because he comes in and we all think he's, you know, and we all, I mean, that's the joke.

Frederick I see that.

Belinda My sweet, the rest of the plot depends on it!

Frederick I see that. But it is rather a coincidence, isn't it?

Lloyd It is rather a coincidence, Freddie, yes. Until you reflect that there was an earlier draft of the play, now unfortunately lost to us. And in this the author makes it clear that Philip's father as a young man had travelled extensively in the Middle East.

Frederick I see ... I *see*!

Lloyd You see?

Frederick That's very interesting.

Lloyd I thought you'd like that.

Frederick But will the audience get it?

Lloyd You must tell them, Freddie. Looks. Gestures. That's what acting's all about. OK?

Frederick Yes. Thank you, Lloyd. Thank you.

Lloyd And it will be even more powerful when you do it with no trousers.

Frederick Of course. (*Takes his trousers off*)

Lloyd Right, can we just finish the act? From Belinda's beautiful line, 'You toss me aside like a broken china doll!'

Lloyd *returns to the stalls.*

I'm being so clever out here! What's going to be left of this show when I've gone off to do *Richard III* and you're up there on your own? Right – 'You toss me aside like a broken china doll!'

Flavia You toss me aside like a broken china doll! (*She hits him*)

Sheikh What? What? What?

Burglar And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke I won't ask. But I'll tell you one thing,

Vicki.

Pause.

Lloyd Brooke!

Brooke Sorry ...

Lloyd Your line. Come on, love, we're two lines away from the end of the act.

Brooke I don't understand.

Lloyd Give her the line!

Poppy (*off*) 'What's that, Dad?'

Brooke Yes, but I don't understand.

Belinda It's 'What's that, Dad?'

Selsdon Yes, I say to you, 'I'll tell you one thing, Vicki' and you say to me, 'What's that, Dad?'

Brooke I don't understand why the Sheikh looks like Philip.

Silence. Everyone waits for the storm. Lloyd comes slowly up on stage.

Lloyd Poppy! Bring the book!

Enter Poppy from the wings, with the book.

Lloyd (*patiently*) Is that the line, Poppy? 'I don't understand why the Sheikh looks like Philip'? Can we consult the author's text and make absolutely sure?

Poppy Well, I think it's ...

Lloyd (*with exquisite politeness*) 'What's that, Dad?' Right. That's the line, Brooke, love. We all know you've worked in very classy places up in London where they let you make the play up as you go along, but we don't want that kind of thing here, do we. Not when the author has provided us with such a considered and polished line of his own. Not at one o'clock in the morning. Not two lines away from the end of Act One. Not when we're just about to get a tea break before we all drop dead of exhaustion. We merely want to hear the line. (*Suddenly puts his mouth next to Brooke's ear and shouts*) 'What's that, Dad?' (*All patience and politeness again*) That's all. Nothing else. I'm not being unreasonable, am I?

Brooke *abruptly turns, runs upstairs and exits into the mezzanine*

bathroom.

Lloyd Exit? Does it say 'exit'?

The sound of 'Brooke weeping, off, and running downstairs.

Lloyd Oh dear, now she's going to wash her lenses away.

Exit Lloyd through the front door.

Frederick (*chastened*) Oh, good Lord.

Selsdon (*likewise*) A little heavy with the sauce, I thought.

Garry I thought it was going to be Poppy when he finally, you know.

Dotty It's usually Poppy. Isn't it, love?

Poppy *smiles wanly.*

Frederick I suppose that was all my fault.

Garry But why pick on, you know?

Dotty Yes, why Brooke?

Belinda I thought it was quite sweet, actually.

Garry Sweet?

Belinda Trying to pretend they're not having a little thing together.

Dotty A little thing? Lloyd and Brooke ... ?

Belinda Didn't you know?

Selsdon Brooke and Lloyd?

Belinda Where do you think they've been all weekend?

Frederick Good Lord. You mean, that's why he wasn't here when poor old Tim ...

He stops, conscious that Tim is behind the sofa.

Dotty ... put the set up back-to-front.

Belinda Sh! Here they come!

Enter Lloyd with his arm round Brooke.

Lloyd OK. All forgotten. I was irresistible.

Poppy I think I'm going to be sick.

Exit Poppy into the wings.

Dotty Oh, no!

Lloyd Oh, for heaven's sake!

Exit Lloyd after Poppy.

Garry You mean ... ?

Selsdon Her, too? **Frederick** Oh, great Scott!

Belinda Well, that's something I *didn't* know.

Brooke I think I'm going to faint.

Dotty Yes, sit down, love!

They sit Brooke down.

Belinda Quick – do your meditation.

Selsdon Well, that's something *she* didn't know!

Belinda Hush, love.

Dotty Two weeks' rehearsal, that's all we've had.

Frederick Whatever next?

Selsdon *Most* exciting!

Belinda (*indicating Brooke*) Sh!

Selsdon Oh, yes. Sh!

Dotty Here he comes.

Enter Lloyd from the wings, subdued.

Dotty Is she all right, love?

Lloyd She'll be all right in a minute. Something she ate, probably.

Garry (*indicating Brooke*) Yes, this one's feeling a bit, you know.

Lloyd I'm feeling a bit, you know, myself. I think I'm going to -

Belinda Which?

Garry (*offering a chair*) Faint?

Belinda (*offering a vase*) Or be sick?

Lloyd (*subsides on to the chair*) – need that tea break.

Dotty You're certainly overdoing it at the moment, love.

Lloyd So could we just have the last line of the act?

Selsdon Me? Last line? Right.

Burglar But I'll tell you one thing, Vicki.

Vicki (*with a murderous look at Lloyd*) What's that, Dad?

Burglar When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's
nothing like a ...

Selsdon ... what?

Poppy (*off, tearful*) Oh ... 'A good old-fashioned plate of
sardines.'

Selsdon What did she say?

Belinda 'A good old-fashioned plate ...'

She hands him Mrs Clackett's plate.

Burglar A good old-fashioned plate of ...

Selsdon ... what?

Poppy *runs on with the book, Lloyd jumps to his feet, Tim jumps up
from behind the sofa.*

Everyone except Selsdon *Sardines!*

Tableau, with raised sardines. The tableau continues.

Lloyd *And curtain!*

Poppy (*realises, sobs*) Oh!

She runs hurriedly into the wings.

CURTAIN

Act Two

The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.

(Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne. Wednesday matinée, 13 February)

But this time we are watching the action from behind; the whole set has been turned through 180 degrees. All the doors can be seen – there is no masking behind them. Two stairways lead up to the platform that gives access to the doors on the upper level. Some of the scene inside the living-room is visible through the full-length window. There are also two doors in the backstage fabric of the theatre: one giving access to the dressing-rooms, and the pass door into the auditorium. The usual backstage furnishings, including the prompt corner and props table, chairs for the actors, a fire-point with fire-buckets and fire-axe, etc.

Tim *is walking anxiously up and down in his dinner jacket.*

Poppy *is speaking into the microphone in the prompt corner.*

Poppy *(over the tannoy)* Act One beginners, please. Your calls, Miss Otley, Miss Ashton, Mr Lejeune, Mr Fellowes, Miss Blair. Act One beginners, please.

Tim And maybe Act One beginners is what we'll get. What do you think?

Poppy *(to Tim)* Oh, Dotty'll pull herself together now we've called beginners. Now she knows she's got to be on stage in five minutes. Won't she?

Tim Will she?

Poppy You know what Dotty's like.

Tim We've only been on the road for a month! We've only got to Ashton-under-Lyne! What's it going to be like by the time we've got to Stockton-on-Tees?

Poppy If only she'd speak!

Tim If only she'd unlock her dressing-room door! Look, if Dotty won't go on ...

Poppy Won't go on?

Tim If she won't.

Poppy She will.

Tim Of course she will.

Poppy Won't she?

Tim I'm sure she will. But if she *doesn't* ...

Poppy She must!

Tim She will, she will. But if she *didn't* ...

Poppy I'd have five minutes to change. Four minutes.

Tim If only she'd say something.

The pass door opens cautiously, and Lloyd puts his head round. He closes it again at the sight of Poppy.

Poppy I'll have another go. Takes your mind off your own problems, anyway.

Exit Poppy in the direction of the dressing-rooms.

Lloyd puts his head back round the door.

Lloyd Has she gone?

Tim Lloyd! I didn't know you were coming today!

Lloyd comes in. He is carrying a bottle of whisky.

Lloyd I wasn't. I haven't.

Tim Anyway, thank God you're here!

Lloyd I'm not. I'm in Aberystwyth. I'm in the middle of rehearsing *Richard III*.

Tim Dotty and Garry ...

Lloyd I don't want anyone to know I'm in.

Tim No, but Dotty and Garry ...

Lloyd I just want two hours alone and undisturbed with Brooke in her dressing-room between shows, then I'm on the 7.25 back to Wales. (*Gives Tim the whisky*) This is for Brooke. Put it somewhere safe. Make sure Selsdon doesn't get his hands on it.

Tim Right. They've had some kind of row...

Lloyd Good, good. (*Takes money out of his wallet and gives it to Tim.*) There's a little flower shop across the road from the stage door. I want you to buy me some very large and expensive-looking flowers.

Tim Right. Now Dotty's locked herself in her dressing-room ...

Lloyd Don't let Poppy see them. They're not for Poppy.

Tim No. And she won't speak to anyone ...

Lloyd First house finishes just after five, yes? Second house starts at seven thirty?

Tim Lloyd, that's what I'm trying to tell you – there may not *be* a show!

Lloyd She hasn't walked out already?

Tim No one knows *what* she's doing! She's locked in her dressing-room! She won't speak to anyone!

Lloyd You've called beginners?

Tim Yes!

Lloyd I can't play a complete love scene from cold in five minutes. It's not dramatically possible.

Tim She's had bust-ups with Garry before, of course.

Lloyd Brooke's had a bust-up with Garry?

Tim Brooke? Not Brooke – Dotty!

Lloyd Oh, Dotty.

Tim I mean, they had the famous bust-up the week before last, when we were playing Worksop.

Lloyd Right, right, you told me on the phone.

Tim She went out with this journalist bloke ...

Lloyd Journalist – yes, yes ...

Tim But you know Garry threatened to kill him?

Lloyd Killed him, yes, I know. Listen, don't worry about Dotty – she's got money in the show.

Tim Yes, but now it's happened again! Two o'clock this morning I'm woken up by this great banging on my door. It's Garry. Do I know where Dotty is? She hasn't come home.

Lloyd Tim, let me tell you something about *my* life. I have the Duke of Buckingham on the phone to me for an hour after rehearsal every evening complaining that the Duke of Gloucester is sucking boiled sweets through his speeches. The Duke of Clarence is off for the entire week doing a commercial for Madeira. Richard himself – would you believe? – Richard III? (*He demonstrates*) – has now gone down with a back problem. I keep getting messages from Brooke about how unhappy she is here and now she's got herself a doctor's certificate for nervous exhaustion – she's going to walk! I have no time to find or rehearse another Vicki. I have just one afternoon, while Richard is fitted for a surgical corset, to cure Brooke of nervous exhaustion, with no medical aids except a little whisky – you've got the whisky? – a few flowers – you've got the money for the flowers? – and a certain faded charm. So I haven't come to the theatre to hear about other people's problems. I've come to be taken out of myself and preferably not put back again.

Tim Yes, but Lloyd ...

Lloyd Have you done the front-of-house calls?

Tim Oh, the front-of-house calls!

Tim *hurries to the microphone in the prompt corner, still holding the money and whisky.*

Lloyd And don't let Poppy see those flowers!

Exit Lloyd through the pass door.

Tim (*into microphone*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in three minutes.

Enter Poppy from the dressing-rooms.

Poppy We're going to be so late up!

Tim No luck?

Poppy Belinda's having a go. I haven't even started the front-of-house calls yet ... Money? What's this for?

Tim Nothing, nothing! (*He puts the money behind his back and automatically produces the whisky with the other hand*)

Poppy Whisky!

Tim Oh ... is it?

Poppy Where did you find that?

Tim Well ...

Poppy Up here? You mean Selsdon's hiding them round the stage now? *(She takes the whisky)*

Tim Oh ...

Poppy I'll put it in the ladies' loo. At least he won't go in there.

Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms.

Poppy No?

Belinda You know what Dotty's like when she's like this. Freddie's trying now ... *(She sees the whisky)* Oh, no!

Poppy He's hiding them round the stage now.

Enter Frederick from the dressing-rooms.

Poppy No? **Frederick** No.

Belinda You didn't try for very long, my precious!

Frederick No, well ... *(He sees the whisky)* Oh dear.

Belinda He's hiding them on stage now.

Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms, holding the whisky.

Frederick No, Garry came rushing out of his dressing-room in a great state. I couldn't quite understand what he was saying. I often feel with Garry that I must have missed something somewhere. You know how stupid I am about that kind of thing. But I think he was saying he wanted to kill me.

Belinda Oh, my poor sweet!

Frederick I thought I'd better leave him to it. I don't want to make things worse. He's all right, is he?

Belinda Who, Garry? Anything but, by the sound of it!

Frederick I mean, he's going on?

Tim Garry? *Garry's* going on. Of course he's going on. What's all this about *Garry* not going on?

Belinda Yes, because if you have to go on for Garry, Poppy can't go on for Dotty, because if Poppy goes on for Dotty, you'll have to be on the book!

Tim This is getting farcical.

Belinda Money.

Tim Money?

Belinda You're waving money around.

Tim Oh, that's for ... Oh ... !

Tim *hurriedly grabs his raincoat from a peg and exits into the dressing-rooms.*

Frederick She's a funny woman, you know – Dotty. So up and down. She was perfectly all right last night.

Belinda Last night?

Frederick Yes, she took me for a drink after the show in some club she knows about.

Belinda She was *with you*? You were with *her*?

Frederick She was being very sympathetic about all my troubles.

Belinda She's not going to sink her teeth into you! I won't let her!

Frederick No, no, she couldn't have been nicer. In fact, she came back to my digs afterwards for a cup of tea and she told me all *her* troubles. Sat there until three o'clock this morning. I don't know *what* the landlady thought!

Enter Poppy.

Poppy And another thing.

Belinda Nothing else, my sweet!

Poppy Where's Selsdon?

Belinda It turns out that it's Freddie here who's the cause of all the ... Selsdon?

Poppy He's not in his dressing-room.

Belinda Oh – I might have guessed!

Poppy Oh – the front-of-house calls!

Belinda You do the calls. I'll took for Selsdon.

Frederick What shall I do?

Belinda (*firmly*) Absolutely nothing at all.

Frederick Right.

Belinda You've done quite enough already, my pet.

Exit Belinda to the dressing-rooms.

Poppy (*into the microphone*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in three minutes.

Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms in his raincoat, carrying a large bunch of flowers.

Tim He wants to kill someone. *(He takes off his raincoat)*

Poppy *Selsdon* wants to kill someone?

Tim Garry, Garry... *Selsdon*?

Poppy We've lost him.

Tim Oh, not again!

Poppy Flowers!

Tim *(embarrassed)* Oh ... Well ... They're just ... You know ...

Poppy *(taking them)* Oh, Tim that's really sweet of you!

Tim Oh ... Well ...

Poppy *(to Frederick)* Isn't that sweet of him?

Frederick Very charming.

She kisses Tim.

Poppy I'll just look in the pub. *(She gives the flowers to Frederick.)* Hold these.

Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms.

Tim I'll take those. *(He takes the flowers.)* Oh, the front-of-house calls! Hold these. *(He gives the flowers back to Frederick.)*

Frederick Oh, I think Poppy's done them.

Tim She gave them two minutes, did she? I'll give them one minute. *(Into the microphone.)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in one minute.

He takes the flowers from Frederick.

Frederick Oh dear, I think she said three minutes.

Tim *Three* minutes? I said three minutes! *She* said three minutes?

Frederick I think so.

Tim Hold these. *(He gives Frederick the flowers. Into the microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in two minutes.

Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms, holding the bottle of whisky.

Frederick Any luck?

Belinda No, but I found yet another bottle.

Frederick Oh dear.

Tim Oh ...

Belinda Hidden in the ladies' lavatory, would you believe.

Frederick Oh, my Lord!

Tim (*takes it*) Oxfam! I'll give it to Oxfam!

Poppy *runs in from the dressing-rooms.*

Poppy He's not in the pub ...

Belinda (*indicates the whisky to Poppy*) No, he's hanging round ladies' lavatories.

Tim I'd better get the spare gear on.

Exit Tim to the dressing-rooms with the whisky.

Poppy (*into the microphone*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in two minutes.

Frederick Oh dear – Tim's already told them two minutes.

Poppy He's done two minutes? (*Into the microphone.*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in one minute.

Enter Lloyd through the pass door.

Lloyd What the fuck is going on?

Belinda Lloyd!

Frederick Great Scott!

Poppy I didn't know you were here!

Lloyd I'm not here! I'm at the Aberystwyth Festival! But I can't sit out there and listen to 'two minutes ... three minutes ... one minute ... two minutes'!

Belinda My sweet, we're having great dramas downstairs!

Lloyd We're having great dramas out there! (*To Poppy.*) This is the matinée, honey! There's old-age pensioners out there! 'The curtain will rise in three minutes' – we all start for the Gents. 'The curtain will rise in one minute' – we all come running out again. We don't know which way we're going!

Poppy Lloyd, I've got to have a talk to you.

Lloyd (*kissing her*) Of course, honey, of course. Looking forward to it.

Poppy You got my message?

Lloyd Many, many messages.

Poppy Why didn't you answer?

Lloyd I did! I have! I'm here!

Poppy Lloyd, there's something I've got to tell you.

Lloyd Go on, then.

Poppy Well ... *(She hesitates, embarrassed because other people can hear, then tries to keep her voice down)* I went to the doctor today...

Enter Brooke from the dressing-rooms, with the whisky.

Belinda Brooke!

Lloyd *hastily abandons Poppy.*

Lloyd *(to Poppy)* Later, later. All right?

Brooke *holds up the whisky.*

Belinda Oh, no! Not another one!

Brooke In my dressing-room!

Belinda *(she takes the whisky)* In your dressing-room? *(To Lloyd.)* It's getting completely out of control!

Frederick *(taking the whisky)* I'll give it to Oxfam, with the other one.

Lloyd *(holds out his hand for the whisky)* I'll do it. Thank you.

Brooke *(sees him)* Lloyd! *(Peers.)* Lloyd?

Lloyd Got it in one. *(Kisses her.)*

Brooke You got my message?

Lloyd And came running, honey, and came running.

Brooke Lloyd, we've got to have a talk.

Lloyd We're going to have a talk, my love.

Brooke When?

Lloyd Later, yes? Later.

He goes to take the whisky from Frederick, but is distracted by seeing the flowers that Frederick is holding.

Flowers?

Frederick Oh, yes, sorry. *(He gives the flowers to Poppy.)*

Poppy Tim bought them for me. *(She puts them on her desk in the prompt corner.)*

Lloyd *Tim?* Bought them for you?

Poppy To cheer me up. *(Anxiously.)* Lloyd ...

Lloyd Nothing more, just for the moment. Thank you. *(To Frederick.)* Strangle Tim for me when you see him, will you?

Frederick Right.

Lloyd *goes towards the pass door.*

Belinda But what about Dotty?

Lloyd I don't want to hear about Dotty.

Frederick And Garry?

Lloyd Not about Garry, either.

Belinda What about Selsdon?

Lloyd Listen, I think this show is beyond the help of a director. You just do it. I'll sit out there in the dark with a bag of toffees and enjoy it. OK? 'One minute' was the last call, if your memory goes back that far.

Brooke Lloyd!

Poppy Wait!

Lloyd *exits through the pass door. Poppy and Brooke jostle to follow him.*

Brooke *(to Poppy)* Excuse me!

Poppy I've got to talk to him!

Frederick *(separating them)* Girls, girls!

Brooke *(indicates the dressing-rooms)* I've a good mind to put my coat on and walk out of that door right here and now.

Frederick Listen, if you don't feel up to performing I'm sure Poppy would always be happy to have a bash on your behalf.

Brooke I beg your pardon?

Poppy Honestly!

Belinda *(firmly)* Brooke, you sit down and do your meditation. Poppy, you go and see what's happening with Dotty and Garry.

Brooke *reluctantly sits down on the floor. Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms.*

Belinda Freddie, my sweet precious ...

Frederick Did I say something wrong?

Enter Selsdon hurriedly through the pass door.

Selsdon Where's Tim?

Belinda Selsdon! My sweet! Where have you been?

Frederick Are you all right? *(He puts out a sympathetic hand, then realises that it contains the whisky bottle)* Oh dear. *(He hurriedly puts it out of sight behind his back)*

Belinda We've been looking for you everywhere!

Selsdon Oh, yes, everywhere. In front – manager's office - bar. Not a sign of him.

Belinda He's looking for you in the dressing-rooms.

Selsdon That's right! Great shindig been going on down there. I thought Tim ought to know about it.

Belinda My love, I think he's heard.

Selsdon Oh, everything! Oh, he really went for her! 'I know when you've got your eye on someone!'

Frederick Oh dear, Dotty's got her eye on someone, has she?

Selsdon 'I've seen you creeping off into corners with that poor halfwit.'

Frederick Which poor halfwit?

Belinda Never mind, my love.

Frederick Not *Tim*?

Belinda No, no, no.

Frederick But who else is there? Apart from me?

Enter Poppy from the dressing-rooms.

Poppy I think they're coming.

Belinda They're coming!

Frederick They're coming!

Selsdon I knew they wouldn't.

Poppy And you're *here*!

Selsdon Oh, yes, every word!

Poppy Right. *(Into the microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will

you please take your seats. The performance is about to begin.

Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms, in Burglar's costume.

Tim They're coming.

Belinda And we've found Selsdon.

Tim (to Selsdon) How did you get here?

Selsdon How? Through the wall!

Tim (into the microphone) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats.

Poppy I've done it!

Tim (into the microphone) The performance is about to ...

Poppy I've done it, I've done it!

Tim (to Poppy) Done it? Done 'about to begin'? **Poppy** Yes! About to begin, about to begin!

Tim (into the microphone) is about to ... is about to begin *at any moment.*

Belinda Poor Lloyd! He'll choke on his toffees.

Selsdon No, the walls are very thin, you see. 'I'm absolutely sick to death of it,' she cries ... *(Takes in what Tim is wearing.)* Am I setting a bit of a trend?

Tim (realises) Oh...

Belinda (quickly, snatching Tim's Burglar cap off)

Understudy rehearsal, my love.

Selsdon Oh, for Garry, yes – very timely. 'You try to give some poor devil a leg up,' she says.

Enter Garry from the dressing-rooms.

Belinda Garry, my sweet!

Selsdon Or she may have said, 'a leg over...' Oh, and here he is.

Frederick (to Garry) Are you all right?

Frederick *collects the box and the flight bag from the props table and smilingly offers them to Garry, who snatches them angrily.*

Selsdon What does he say?

Belinda He's not saying anything, Selsdon, my sweet.

Selsdon Very sensible. Only stir it up again. 'I've seen you giving him little nods and smiles!' – that's what he kept saying.

Enter Dotty from the dressing-rooms.

Belinda Dotty, my love!

Selsdon Oh, she's emerged, has she? Come on, old girl! You're on!

Frederick Are you all right?

Selsdon Is she all right?

Dotty merely sighs and smiles, and gives a little squeeze of the arm to Belinda. She takes up her place by the service quarters entrance, a tragically misunderstood woman. Garry moves pointedly away.

Belinda (to **Selsdon**) She's fine.

Tim All right, everyone?

Selsdon 'Little hugs and squeezes.'

Belinda Hush, love.

Poppy Curtain up?

Everyone looks anxiously from Dotty to Garry and back again. Dotty and Garry both ignore the looks. They stand aloof, then both at the same moment turn to check their appearance in the little mirrors fixed to the back of the set.

Frederick Look, Dotty ... Look, Garry ... I'm not going to make a great speech, but we *have* all got to go out there and put on a performance, and well ...

Belinda We can't do it in silence, my loves! We're going to have to speak to each other!

Pause. Neither Garry nor Dotty has apparently heard.

Dotty (suddenly, bravely, to **Tim**) What's the house like?

Belinda That's the spirit!

Frederick Well done, Dotty!

Tim It's quite good. Well, for a matinée.

Poppy There's quite a crowd at the front of the back stalls.

Selsdon (to **Poppy**) Come on, girl, get the tabs up! Some of those OAPs out there haven't got long to go.

Poppy Right. Quiet, then, please ...

Frederick Let me just say one more word ... Hold it a moment, Poppy ...

Selsdon Let *me* just say one word. Sardines!

Belinda Sardines!

Frederick Sardines!

Belinda *rushes to the prop table to fetch Dotty the plate of sardines that she takes on for her first entrance.*

Poppy *(over tannoy)* Standing by, please. Music cue one ...

Enter Lloyd through the pass door.

Lloyd Now what?

Tim We're just going up.

Lloyd We've been sitting there for an hour! They've gone quiet! They think someone's died!

Frederick I'm sorry, Lloyd. It's my fault. I was just saying a few words to everyone.

Lloyd Freddie, have you ever thought of having a brain transplant?

Frederick Sorry, sorry. Wrong moment. I see that.

Lloyd Anybody else have thoughts they feel they must communicate?

Poppy Well, not now, of course, but ...

Lloyd *What?*

Poppy I mean, you know, later ...

Lloyd *(to Tim, quietly, conscious that Brooke has stopped meditating and started watching)* And you bought these flowers for Poppy?

Tim No ... *(Conscious that Poppy is watching.)* Well ... yes ...

Lloyd And you didn't buy any flowers for *me*?

Tim No ... well ... no ...

Lloyd Tim, have you ever heard of such a thing as jealous rage?

Tim Yes ... well ... yes ...

Lloyd Then take ten pounds of your own money, Tim, and go out to the florists and buy some flowers for *me*!

Tim Lloyd, we're just going up! I've got to run the show!

Lloyd Never mind the show. Concentrate on the floral arrangements. Bought them for Poppy! You two could have

Freddie's old brain. You could have half each.

Exit Lloyd through the pass door. Poppy sobs.

Frederick Oh dear.

Belinda Don't cry, Poppy, love

Selsdon Just get the old bus on the road.

Poppy *(over tannoy, tearfully)* Standing by, please. Elecs stand by.

Garry *(to himself)* Christ! *(He hammers his fist against the back of the set in frustration)*

Poppy Quiet backstage!

She waits for Garry to subside, then gives an involuntary noisy sob herself.

Belinda Hush, love.

Poppy *(over tannoy, tearfully)* Music cue one go.

The introductory music for Nothing On.

Tab going up ...

[Note: the act that follows is a somewhat condensed version of the one we saw rehearsed.]

As the curtain rises the telephone is ringing.

Dotty makes her entrance. —

— *Enter from the service quarters Mrs Clackett, carrying a plate of sardines.*

There is a sound of scattered applause. —

Mrs Clackett It's no good you going on . . .

— *She pauses a beat to acknowledge the applause.*

I can't open sardines and answer the phone. I've only got one pair of feet.

A small laugh. —

— *Puts the sardines down on the telephone table by the sofa and picks up the phone.*

Selsdon, Belinda and Frederick express silent relief that the show has at last started, so all their problems are over. They subside on to the backstage chairs.

Tim puts his raincoat on, takes out his wallet, checks his money and exits to the dressing-rooms.

Belinda points out to the others that **Garry** is banging his head softly against the set again.

Frederick puts the whisky down on his chair and goes across to **Garry**. **Belinda** watches apprehensively as **Frederick** gives **Garry**'s arm a silently sympathetic squeeze, and smilingly puts his fingers to his lips to remind him to be quiet.

Hello . . . Yes, but there's no one here, love . . . No, Mr Brent's not here . . . He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain . . . Mr Philip Brent, that's right . . . The one who writes the plays, that's him, only now he writes them in Spain . . . No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here . . . Am I in Spain? No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with, because it's the royal what's it called on

Belinda hurries across to draw **Frederick** off. **Frederick** cannot understand what he has done to cause offence. He demonstrates what he did by giving **Garry**'s arm another friendly squeeze.

Garry drops his props and threatens to hit **Frederick**.

Frederick takes shelter behind **Brooke**, who is now waiting for her entrance. **Garry** chases him round and round her.

Frederick hurriedly puts his handkerchief to his nose.

Belinda urges **Garry** to the front door for his entrance. —————

Brooke makes her entrance. —

the telly – the royal you know – where's the paper, then . . .

She searches in the newspaper.

. . . And if it's to do with letting the house then you'll have to ring the house agents, because they're the agents for the house . . . Squire, Squire, Hackham and who's the other one . . . ? No, they're not in Spain, they're next to the phone in the study. Squire, Squire, Hackham and, hold on, I'll go and look.

She replaces the receiver.

Always the same, isn't it. Soon as you take the weight off your feet, down it all comes on your head.

Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper.

The sound of a key in the lock.

—— The front door opens. On the doorstep stands **Roger**, holding a cardboard box.

Roger . . . I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

—— Enter **Vicki** through the front door.

Frederick looks in his handkerchief and comes over faint.
Dotty has to put her arm round him to help him to a chair.

As **Garry** turns back ———
to collect the flight bag he gets a fleeting glimpse of this.

As **Garry** comes through the service quarters he takes another look. ———

He stamps on **Frederick's** foot and re-enters. ———

Frederick struggles with damaged foot and bleeding nose.
Dotty gets down on her knees to examine the foot.

Garry keeps appearing at the various doors, trying to see what **Dotty** and **Frederick** are up to. ———

Belinda makes things worse by trying to move **Dotty's** head to a less suggestive position.

Roger So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

—— **Roger** goes back and brings in a flight bag, and closes the front door.

I'll just check.

—— He opens the door to the service quarters. **Vicki** gazes round.

Roger Hello? Anyone at home?

—— Closes the door.

No, there's no one here. So what do you think?

Vicki All these doors!

Roger Oh, only a handful, really.

—— He opens the various doors one after another to demonstrate.

Study . . . Kitchen . . . And a self-contained service flat for the housekeeper.

Vicki Terrific. And which one's the . . . ?

Roger What?

Vicki You know . . .

Garry comes off——
and rushes at **Frederick** and
Dotty. **Belinda** pushes him
back on stage.

Belinda just manages to detach
Dotty from her ministrations
and get her back on stage for her
entrance.——

Belinda tries to explain to
Frederick that **Dotty** has
taken a fancy to him.
Frederick can't understand a
word of it.

Belinda has to break off to
remind **Brooke** to . . .

. . . push the bathroom door
open.——

Roger The usual offices?
Through here.

—— *He opens the downstairs
bathroom door for her.*

Vicki Fantastic.

Exit Vicki into the bathroom.

—— *Enter Mrs Clackett
from the study, without the
newspaper.*

Mrs Clackett Now I've
lost the sardines. . .

*Mutual surprise. Roger closes
the door to the bathroom and slips
the champagne back into the bag.*

Roger I'm sorry. I
thought there was no one
here.

Mrs Clackett I'm not
here. I'm off, only it's the
royal you know, where they
wear those hats, and they're
all covered in fruit, and who
are you?

Roger I'm from the
agents. I just dropped in to
. . . go into a few things.

—— *The bathroom door opens.*

Well, to check some of the
measurements . . .

Roger closes it.

And again. —————

Belinda suddenly points out that **Selsdon** has discovered the whisky that **Frederick** left on the chair. **Selsdon** opens the bottle, smells it, closes it again and then goes off to the dressing-rooms with it.

Frederick goes to run after **Selsdon**. **Belinda** silently urges him to wait there – sit still – do absolutely nothing – while she runs after **Selsdon**.

*Exit **Belinda** in the direction of the dressing-rooms in pursuit of **Selsdon**.*

Dotty makes her exit . . . ——— puts down the sardines, shaking her head with misery, and begins to weep.

————— *The bathroom door opens.*

Do one or two odd jobs . . .

Roger closes it.

Oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective tenant over the house.

The bathroom door opens.

Vicki What's wrong with this door?

Roger closes it.

Roger She's thinking of renting it. Her interest is definitely aroused.

*Enter **Vicki** from bathroom.*

Vicki That's not the bedroom.

Roger The bedroom? No, that's the downstairs bathroom and WC suite. And this is the housekeeper, Mrs Crockett.

Mrs Clackett Clackett, dear, Clackett. Only now I've lost the newspaper.

————— *Exit **Mrs Clackett** into the study, carrying the sardines.*

Roger I'm sorry about this.

Frederick *is very agitated by this. He takes the sardines away from Dotty, pats her on the shoulder, gives her a handkerchief, realises that it's not in a state to be seen, puts it hurriedly away, pushes the sardines back into her hand and edges her towards the door.*

At the last moment Dotty realises she hasn't got the newspaper.

Frederick *runs and fetches it from the props table. Dotty realises that she is still holding the sardines, and hurls them to Frederick just in time . . .*

. . . to make her entrance.——

Vicki That's all right. We don't want the television, do we?

Roger Only she's been in the family for generations.

Vicki Great. Come on, then. *(She starts upstairs.)* I've got to be in Basingstoke by four.

Roger Perhaps we should just have a glass of champagne.

Vicki We'll take it up with us.

Roger Yes. Well . . .

Vicki And don't let my files out of sight.

Roger No. Only . . .

Vicki What?

Roger Well . . .

Vicki Her?

Roger She *has* been in the family for generations.

—— Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, with the newspaper but without the sardines.

*Enter **Belinda** from the dressing-rooms leading a bewildered **Selsdon**, but without the whisky.*

Frederick *tells her what a terrible state **Dotty** is in.*

They turn to watch her anxiously as she makes her exit. —————

Selsdon *seizes the opportunity to depart again to the dressing-rooms.*

Belinda *runs after **Selsdon**. **Frederick** goes to run after her, but turns anxiously back to reassure **Dotty**.*

*But **Dotty** is now smiling bravely and telling **Frederick** that she has pulled herself together, thanks to him.*

Mrs Clackett Sardines . . . Sardines . . . It's not for me to say, of course, dear, only I will just say this: don't think twice about it – take the plunge. You'll really enjoy it here.

Vicki Oh. Great.

Mrs Clackett *(to **Vicki**)* And we'll enjoy having you. *(To **Roger**.)* Won't we, love?

Roger Oh. Well.

Vicki Terrific.

Mrs Clackett Sardines, sardines. Can't put your feet up on an empty stomach, can you.

———— *Exit **Mrs Clackett** to service quarters.*

Vicki You see? She thinks it's great. She's even making us sardines!

Roger Well. . .

Vicki I think she's terrific.

Roger Terrific.

Vicki So which way?

Roger *(picking up the bags)* All right. Before she comes back with the sardines.

Vicki Up here?

Roger Yes, yes.

Dotty gives **Frederick** a kiss to express her gratitude.

As **Garry** comes through — the door of the mezzanine bathroom he catches a fleeting glimpse of the kiss.

Frederick takes the cardboard box and goes to make his entrance, then turns back to pick up the flight bag and looks round for **Belinda** to give it to. No **Belinda**. He urgently shows **Dotty** the flight bag and explains the situation to her.

Garry appears in the linen cupboard doorway. — He takes a good look at the earnest colloquy between **Frederick** and **Dotty**.

Garry takes the sheet from **Brooke**. —

Garry hurls the sheet at **Frederick** and **Dotty**. — He goes back on stage.

Dotty starts to run off to get **Belinda**, but has to run back to help **Frederick**.

Vicki In here?

Roger Yes, yes, yes.

— *Exeunt* **Roger** and **Vicki** into mezzanine bathroom.

Vicki (off) It's another bathroom.

They reappear.

Roger No, no, no.

Vicki Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

Roger I mean in *here*.

He nods at the next door — the first along the gallery. Vicki leads the way in.

— **Roger** follows.

Vicki Oh, black sheets!

— *She produces one.*

Roger It's the airing cupboard.

— This one, this one.

He drops the bag and box, and struggles nervously to open the second door along the gallery, the bedroom.

Vicki Oh, you're in a real state! You can't even get the door open.

Belinda runs in from the dressing-room, holding the bottle of whisky.

She grabs the flight bag, just manages to give the whisky to Dotty, and . . .

. . . make her entrance. —————

Enter Selsdon from the dressing-rooms.

He asks Dotty for the whisky.

But Dotty is distracted by Garry, who silently but forcefully explains to her that he will no longer tolerate these furtive meetings with Frederick.

Selsdon tries urgently to get the whisky off **Garry** and **Dotty** as they quarrel.

Garry and **Dotty** both turn on him in fury.

Garry pleads with **Dotty** —

Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the bedroom.

The sound of a key in the lock and the front door opens. On the doorstep stands Philip, carrying a cardboard box.

Philip . . . No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember.

— Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Roger's.

Flavia Home!

Philip Home, sweet home!

Flavia Dear old house!

Philip Just waiting for us to come back!

Flavia It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!

Philip picks up the bag and box and ushers **Flavia** towards the stairs.

Philip There is something to be said for being a tax exile.

Flavia Leave those!

He drops the bag and box, and kisses her. She flees upstairs, laughing, and he after her.

Philip Sh!

kneels — weeps — hangs on to her plate of sardines.

Dotty *breaks away from Garry and goes to make her entrance. Selsdon points out that she is still holding the whisky.*

Garry *takes it off her as she makes her entrance.* —————

Selsdon *tries to get the whisky off Garry, but Garry turns to ascend the platform for his entrance.*

Garry *looks around for something to do with the whisky and gives it to Brooke.*

Brooke *peers at it, no idea what she's supposed to do with it.*

She puts it down on the steps, right in front of Selsdon, in order to undress for her entrance. While her back is turned Selsdon snatches it up and conceals it.

Flavia What?

Philip Inland Revenue may hear us!

They creep to the bedroom door.

——— *Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters carrying a fresh plate of sardines.*

Mrs Clackett *(to herself)*
What I did with that first lot of sardines I shall never know.

She puts the sardines on the telephone table and sits on the sofa.

Philip and **Flavia** *(looking down from the gallery)* Mrs Clackett!

Mrs Clackett *jumps up.*

Mrs Clackett Oh, you give me a turn! My heart jumped right out of my boots!

Philip So did mine!

Flavia We thought you'd gone!

Mrs Clackett I thought you was in Spain!

Philip We are! We are!

Selsdon demonstrates to
Brooke pulling a chain.
Brooke peers
uncomprehendingly.

Exit Selsdon to the dressing-rooms with the whisky.

Belinda makes her exit. —

Belinda looks urgently round for **Selsdon**, then makes drinking gestures interrogatively to **Brooke**. **Brooke** points towards the dressing-rooms and repeats **Selsdon's** incomprehensible gesture of pulling a chain. *Exit Belinda* towards the dressing-room.

Garry, still on the platform, tries to see what **Dotty** and **Frederick** are doing, but is fetched back by **Brooke** . . .

Flavia You haven't seen us!

Philip We're not here!

Mrs Clackett You'll want your things, look. (*She indicates the bag and box.*)

Philip Oh. Yes. Thanks.

He comes downstairs, and picks up the bag and box.

Mrs Clackett (*to Flavia*) Oh, and that bed hasn't been aired, love.

Flavia I'll get a hot-water bottle.

— *Exit Flavia into the mezzanine bathroom.*

Mrs Clackett I've put all your letters in the study, dear.

Philip Oh, good heavens. Where are they?

Mrs Clackett I've put them all in the pigeonhouse.

Philip In the pigeonhouse?

Mrs Clackett In the little pigeonhouse in your desk, love.

Exeunt Mrs Clackett and Philip into the study. Philip is still holding the bag and box.

. . . for his entrance. —————

Belinda enters urgently and signals the information that **Selsdon** is drinking in the lavatory.

Frederick runs to the dressing-rooms exit to deal with this, but is brought back by **Belinda** and forced to sit down.

Dotty and **Belinda** run towards the dressing-rooms instead, but **Dotty** immediately has to run back to the study door to go on. **Belinda** runs back to the props table for the sardines, gives them to **Dotty**, just in time for her . . .

. . . to make her entrance. —————

———— Enter **Roger** from the bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie.

Roger Yes, but I could hear voices!

Enter **Vicki** from the bedroom in her underwear.

Vicki Voices? What sort of voices?

Roger People's voices.

Vicki (looks over the bannisters) Oh, look, she's opened our sardines.

She moves to go downstairs.

Roger grabs her.

Roger Come back!

Vicki What?

Roger I'll fetch them!
You can't go downstairs like that.

Vicki Why not?

Roger Mrs Crackett.

Vicki Mrs Crackett?

Roger One has certain obligations.

———— Enter **Mrs Clackett** from the study. She is carrying the first plate of sardines.

Mrs Clackett (to herself)
Sardines here. Sardines

Brooke makes her exit. —

Belinda tries to demonstrate to **Brooke** that she is going to look for **Selsdon**, then runs back to remind her . . .

. . . to open the linen cupboard door. —

Enter **Tim** from the dressing-rooms with a second, smaller, bunch of flowers. He takes his raincoat off. **Belinda** gestures hastily to **Tim** in passing to explain the situation and exits to the dressing-rooms.

Tim asks **Frederick** where she is going.

Frederick demonstrates raising the elbow.

Enter **Belinda** from the dressing-rooms. She demonstrates that **Selsdon** has locked himself in somewhere.

there. It's like a Sunday school outing.

— **Roger** pushes **Vicki** through the first available door, which happens to be the linen cupboard.

Mrs Clackett Oh, you're still poking around, are you?

Roger Yes, still poking . . . well, still around.

Mrs Clackett In the airing cupboard, were you?

Roger No, no.

— The linen cupboard door begins to open. He slams it shut.

Well, just checking the sheets and pillowcases. Going through the inventory.

He starts downstairs.

Mrs Blackett . . .

Mrs Clackett Clackett, dear, Clackett.

She puts down the sardines beside the other sardines.

Roger Mrs Clackett. Is there anyone else in the house, Mrs Clackett?

Mrs Clackett I haven't seen no one, dear.

Frederick *breaks off from the conversation to say* —————

Tim hands **Belinda** the flowers and dashes out to the dressing-rooms.

Belinda gives the flowers to **Frederick** and fetches the fireman's axe from the fire-point. She demonstrates using it to break a door down.

Belinda is going to rush off to the dressing-rooms with the axe when **Poppy** reminds her that she has an entrance coming up. **Belinda** runs up on to the platform, finds that she is still holding the axe and gives it to **Brooke**.

But before **Belinda** can explain what to do with the axe, she has to make her entrance. —————

Garry advances threateningly upon **Frederick** and points suspiciously at the flowers he is holding.

Roger I thought I heard voices.

Mrs Clackett Voices? There's no voices here, love.

Roger I must have imagined it.

—— **Philip** (*off*) Oh, good Lord above!

Roger, with his back to her, picks up both plates of sardines.

Roger I beg your pardon?

Mrs Clackett Oh, good Lord above, the study door's open.

She crosses and closes it. **Roger** looks out of the window.

Roger There's another car outside! That's not Mr Hackham's, is it? Or Mr Dudley's?

Exit **Roger** through the front door, holding both plates of sardines.

—— Enter **Flavia** from the mezzanine bathroom, carrying a hot-water bottle. She sees the linen cupboard door swinging open as she passes, pushes it shut and turns the key.

Flavia Nothing but flapping doors in this house.

Frederick has to hand
Garry the flowers in order to
make his entrance. —

Brooke comes down from the
platform and asks **Garry** what
she is supposed to do with the axe.
Garry takes it thoughtfully and
puts the flowers into her hands.

Belinda, coming down from the
platform to go off after

Selsdon, stops at the sight of
Garry with the axe, as he looks
at it and feels the edge. He looks
at the door through which

Frederick will exit.

Belinda looks at the door
likewise. **Garry** looks back at
the axe. **Belinda** looks back at
the axe. **Garry** begins to smile
an evil smile. Horrified,

Belinda quickly takes the
flowers from **Brooke** and sends
her off in her place to find

Selsdon, then tries to get the
axe away from **Garry**. **Garry**
holds it behind his back.

Belinda, still holding the
flowers, puts her arms round
Garry, trying to reach the axe.

Dotty appears —
just in time to see **Belinda** with
her arms round **Garry**.

Poppy urges **Belinda**
upstairs for her entrance.

Belinda flees up to the platform
and opens the door to make her
entrance. —

*Exit **Flavia** into the bedroom.*

— *Enter from the study*
Philip, holding a tax demand
and its envelope.

Philip ‘... final notice ...
steps will be taken ...
distrain ... proceedings in
court ...’

Mrs Clackett Oh yes,
and that reminds me, a
gentleman come about the
house.

Philip Don’t tell me. I’m
not here.

Mrs Clackett So I’ll just
sit down and turn on the ...
sardines, I’ve forgotten the
sardines! I don’t know – if it
wasn’t fixed to my shoulders
I’d forget what day it was.

— *Exit **Mrs Clackett** to
the service quarters.*

Philip I didn’t get this!
I’m not here. I’m in Spain.
But if I didn’t get it I didn’t
open it.

— *Enter **Flavia** from the
bedroom.*

She makes one desperate effort to grab the dress from the backstage hook where it is hanging, then gives up, and enters still carrying the flowers instead.—————

Belinda, on stage, has to vary the line. —————

Dotty launches herself upon **Garry**. He produces the axe in explanation of his behaviour.

Dotty snatches it from him and raises it to hit him.

Frederick appears ————— and snatches the axe from **Dotty**, in the nick of time. He innocently gives it to **Garry**, who raises it to hit **Frederick**. **Dotty** snatches it from **Garry** and raises it once again to hit him.

Belinda appears ————— and snatches the axe from **Dotty**. . .

————— *She is holding the dress that **Vicki** arrived in.*

Flavia Darling, I never had a dress . . .

————— . . . or rather a bunch of flowers like this, did I?

Philip (abstracted) Didn't you?

Flavia I shouldn't buy anything as tarty as this . . . Oh, it's not something you gave me, is it?

Philip I should never have touched it.

Flavia No, it's lovely.

Philip Stick it down. Put it back. Never saw it.

————— *Exit **Philip** into study.*

Flavia Well, I'll put it in the attic, with all the other things you gave me that are too precious to wear.

————— *Exit **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor.*

... as **Garry** makes his
entrance. —————

Enter **Tim** from the dressing-
rooms. He grabs the axe from
Belinda and returns to the
dressing-rooms.

Belinda is going to follow him,
but then realises that there is ...

... no knocking —————
because **Brooke** is still off.

Garry on stage repeats
the line. —————

Belinda realises what's
wrong, and knocks on the set with
a prop. —————

Brooke doesn't make —————
her entrance because she is still off
in the dressing-rooms.

Garry comes through the linen
cupboard door to look for
Brooke.

He improvises. —————

Belinda tells **Poppy** to read
in **Brooke**'s part from the book.

———— Enter **Roger** through the
front door, still carrying both
plates of sardines.

Roger All right, all right
... Now the study door's
open again! What's going
on?

He puts the sardines down — one
plate on the telephone table, where
it was before, one near the front
door — and goes towards the
study ...

———— Knocking!

———— Knocking ... !
Knocking ... ? Upstairs!

He runs upstairs.

———— Knocking.

Oh my God, there's
something in the airing
cupboard! (He unlocks it and
opens it.)

———— Looks for **Vicki**.

Oh, it's you.

———— Is it you ... ? I mean,
you know, hidden under all
the sheets and towels in

Belinda *hands the flowers to Frederick and runs off to the dressing-rooms, still holding the axe.*

Poppy *(reading)* Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark! With all black sheets and things! —————

Why did *I* lock the door?
Why did *you* lock the door! —

Enter Lloyd like a whirlwind through the pass door. He demands silently to know what's going on.

Frederick *tries to explain, while Poppy and Garry continue to play the scene.*

Poppy *(reading)* Someone locked the door! —————

Frederick *hands Lloyd the flowers to make ready for his entrance.*

Poppy *(reading)* Like what?

OK, I'll take it off. —————

Lloyd *shoves the flowers into Dotty's hands to get rid of them, and indicates to the terrified Poppy that she is to go on for Brooke.*

here . . . I can't just stand here and, you know, indefinitely . . .

—————
Roger But, darling, why did you lock the door?

—————
Roger I didn't lock the door!

—————
Roger Anyway, we can't stand here like this.

—————
Roger In your underwear.

—————
Roger In here, in here!

Exit Roger into the bedroom.

Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope, and a tube of glue.

Enter **Belinda** from the dressing-rooms with **Brooke**, just in time for her to see **Lloyd** tearing **Poppy**'s skirt off.

Garry stands half on and half off, waiting for **Brooke**. —
At the sight of **Brooke**, **Lloyd** abandons **Poppy**, and instead urges **Brooke** upstairs for the next scene, for which she is now late.

Garry improvises. —

Brooke makes her entrance through the linen cupboard door . . .

. . . and starts to play the previous scene that she missed. —

Lloyd despairs at **Brooke**'s inflexibility. **Dotty** asks **Lloyd** if the flowers are really for her. He pushes them back to her absently. **Dotty** is very touched. She gives **Lloyd** a grateful kiss . . .

. . . just as **Garry** appears to see it. —

Philip Darling, this glue. Is it the sort that you can never get unstuck . . . ? Oh, Mrs Clackett's made us some sardines.

Exit **Philip** into the study with the tax demand, envelope, glue and one of the plates of sardines from the telephone table.

— Enter **Roger** from the bedroom, holding the hot-water bottle. He looks up and down the landing.

Roger A hot-water bottle! I didn't put it there!

— I didn't put this hot-water bottle. I mean, you know, I'm standing out here, with the hot-water bottle in my hands . . .

— **Vicki** Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark! With all black sheets and things!

Roger Someone in the bathroom, filling hot-water bottles. . . What?

— Exit **Roger** into the mezzanine bathroom.

Garry moves closer to see, and cuts three pages of script.——

He panics and stands for a moment, unable to think where he is or what he is doing, then enters through the airing cupboard instead of the bedroom. Everyone backstage panics as well: 'Where are we?'

Poppy desperately turns over the pages of the book to find the new place, while **Garry** and everyone else look over her shoulder.

*Enter **Tim** from the dressing-rooms, leading **Selsdon**, who is holding his trousers up. **Tim** is holding the whisky and the axe embedded in a shattered section of the door of the Gents. He hands the whisky to **Frederick**.*

Frederick roars with surprise, ——
claps a hand over his mouth, then realises that he was supposed to roar anyway.

*With another cry **Frederick** hastily conceals the whisky under*

Vicki Why did *I* lock the door? Why did *you* lock the door!

—— **Roger** (*off*) Don't panic!

*Enter **Roger**, and goes downstairs.*

There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this. I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening. You wait here . . . You can't stand here looking like that . . . Wait in the study . . . Study, study, study!

*Exit **Roger** into the service quarters.*

Vicki opens the study door.

—— *There's a roar of exasperation from **Philip**, off. She turns and flees.*

Vicki Roger! There's a strange figure in there! Where are you?

*There is another cry from **Philip**, off.*

*the chairs, grabs his props
and . . .*

. . . makes his entrance. —

Tim gives the axe to **Lloyd** and snatches the flowers from **Dotty**, who snatches them right back, leaving **Tim** with only one. He hands this to **Lloyd**, who hands it to **Brooke**. She peers at it as it keels sadly over, then hurls it on to the floor and runs out to the dressing-rooms.

Lloyd gives more money to **Tim**, who puts his raincoat on and exits wearily to the dressing-rooms.

Selsdon explains to everyone where he innocently was by a show of pulling a chain. The demonstration causes his trousers to fall down. **Selsdon** stoops to retrieve his fallen trousers, and sees the whisky that **Frederick** concealed beneath the chairs. He

Exit Vicki blindly through the front door.

— Enter **Philip** from the study. He is holding the tax demand in his right hand and one of the plates of sardines in his left.

Philip Darling, I know this is going to sound silly, but . . .

He struggles to get the tax demand unstuck from his fingers, encumbered by the plate of sardines.

Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying various pieces of bric-a-brac.

Flavia Darling, if we're not going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic.

Philip I can't come to bed! I'm glued to a tax demand!

Flavia Darling, why don't you put the sardines down?

Philip *puts the plate of sardines down on the table. But when he takes his hand away the sardines come with it.*

Philip Darling, I'm stuck to the sardines!

Flavia Darling, don't play the fool. Get that bottle

*picks it up, and **Lloyd** snatches it out of his hand.*

Frederick *exits*——
*and sees that **Selsdon** is otherwise occupied.*

Frederick *repeats the cue* ——
and slams the door again.

*They all suddenly realise that this is **Selsdon**'s cue. They rush him to the window. He raises his arms to open the window and his trousers fall down.*

They bundle him on as best they can.——

*They watch him. Then **Garry** snatches the flowers from **Dotty**, and hurls them on the floor.*

Frederick *reproachfully picks them up, and hands them back to **Dotty**.*

Garry *grabs the axe from **Lloyd** and advances upon **Frederick**. **Dotty** hands the*

marked poison in the downstairs loo. That cats through anything.

*Exit **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor.*

Philip (*flapping the tax demand*) I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.

—— *Exit **Philip** into the downstairs bathroom.*

—— **Philip** But this is ridiculous.

*Exit **Philip** into the downstairs bathroom.*

—— *The window opens, and through it appears an elderly **Burglar**.*

Burglar No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

He climbs in.

No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do

flowers to **Belinda** so as to be able to throw her arms protectively round **Frederick**. **Belinda** dumps the flowers on **Poppy's** desk so as to be able to snatch **Frederick** away from **Dotty**. **Dotty** snatches him back. They snatch him back and forth, like two dogs with a bone, then push him aside and face up to each other. **Dotty** grabs the axe from **Garry** to use on **Belinda**. But they are distracted because . . .

Selsdon appears at the front door. —————

Selsdon Yes? Yes? 'They all say the same thing . . . ?'

Poppy runs back with the flowers to the corner to give him his prompt.

Poppy 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

Selsdon Hard to what?

Omnes (shouting) 'Adjust to retirement!'

Selsdon goes back on. —————

Selsdon makes his exit. —————

bullion vaults! What am I doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags! So what are they offering? (*He peers at the television.*) One microwave oven.

He unplugs it and puts it on the sofa.

What? Fifty quid? Hardly worth lifting it.

He inspects the paintings and ornaments.

Junk . . . Junk . . . if you insist . . .

He pockets some small item.

Where's his desk? No, they all say the same thing . . .

—— *He opens the front door to get a prompt.*

—— It's hard to assess a requirement . . .

—— *Exit Burglar into the study.*

Dotty is about to resume her attack upon **Belinda** when she realises that **Garry** is already making his entrance.——

Dotty hands the axe panic-stricken to **Belinda** and makes her own entrance.——

Lloyd subsides despairingly into a chair.

Frederick indicates that he will go after **Brooke**.

Belinda insists that she will do it. She runs towards the dressing-rooms with the axe, sees **Lloyd** taking a despairing swig of whisky, and runs back to take the bottle away from him.

Frederick smooths his hair and buttons his jacket, and exits with determination towards the dressing-rooms.

Belinda looks to see how much **Lloyd** has drunk, puts it out of his reach, runs towards the dressing-rooms, realises **Selsdon** has picked up the whisky, and runs back.

—— Enter **Roger** from the service quarters.

Roger . . . And the prospective tenant naturally wishes to know if there is any previous history of paranormal phenomena.

—— Enter **Mrs Clackett**, holding another plate of sardines.

Mrs Clackett Oh, yes, dear, it's all nice and paranormal.

Roger I mean, has anything ever dematerialised before? Has anything ever . . .

He sees the television set on the sofa.

. . . flown about?

Mrs Clackett puts the sardines down on the telephone table, moves the television set back, and closes the front door.

Mrs Clackett Flown about? No, the things move themselves on their own two feet, just like they do in any house.

Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms with a third, very small bunch of flowers. He gives them to Lloyd, but Belinda shows Lloyd Selsdon concealing the whisky about his person and Lloyd goes to deal with him, then comes back to give Belinda the flowers so as to leave his hands free. Selsdon quickly conceals the whisky in the fire-bucket.

Lloyd *searches Selsdon.* —

Selsdon *demonstrates that his hands are empty.*

Belinda *hands the axe to Tim and gives Lloyd a grateful kiss for the flowers.*

Enter Frederick triumphantly from the dressing-rooms, bringing a reluctant Brooke back, still in her overcoat and carrying the holdall.

She reluctantly starts to take the overcoat off, then peers at the spectacle of Belinda, with flowers, kissing Lloyd.

Tim, *seeing this as he takes his raincoat off, puts the raincoat back on again, hands the axe to Lloyd and wearily holds out his hand for money.*

Roger I'd better warn the prospective tenant. She is inspecting the study.

He opens the study door and then closes it again.

There's a man in there!

Mrs Clackett No, no, there's no one in the house, love.

Roger *(opening the study door)* Look! Look!

— He's . . . *searching for something.*

Mrs Clackett *(glancing briefly)* I can't see no one.

Roger You can't see him? But this is extraordinary! And where is my prospective tenant? I left her in there! She's gone! My prospective tenant has disappeared!

He closes the study door and looks round the living-room. He sees the sardines on the telephone table.

Oh my God.

Mrs Clackett Now what?

Roger There!

Mrs Clackett Where?

Roger The sardines!

Lloyd *wearily hands the axe to Frederick and gives Tim his last small change.*

Exit Tim to the dressing-rooms.
Belinda *suddenly realises that her flowers are attracting jealous attention and puts them on Poppy's table with the other flowers.*

Brooke *is amazed and even more upset to see that the flowers are in fact for Poppy. She puts her overcoat back on and turns to walk out again.*

Lloyd *stops her and looks desperately round for some other token of his affection to give her instead of the flowers.*

Frederick, *tidily putting the axe back on the fire point, finds the whisky in the fire-bucket and holds it aloft — another bottle!*

Selsdon *takes the bottle from Frederick, but Lloyd takes it from Selsdon in time for. . .*
. . . Selsdon to make his entrance.—————

Lloyd *gives the whisky to Brooke, kisses her, and tries to persuade her out of her overcoat, while she peers at the bottle.*

Mrs Clackett Oh, the sardines.

Roger You can see the sardines.

Mrs Clackett I can see the sardines.

Roger *touches them cautiously, then picks up the plate.*

Mrs Clackett I can see the way they're going, too.

Roger I'm not letting these sardines out of my hand. But where is my prospective tenant?

He goes upstairs, holding the sardines.

Mrs Clackett I'm going to be opening sardines all night, in and out of here like a cuckoo on a clock.

Exit Mrs Clackett into the service quarters.

Roger Vicki! Vicki!

Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom.

—— *Enter Burglar from the study, carrying an armful of silver cups, etc.*

Burglar No, I miss the violence. I miss having other human beings around to terrify.

Frederick takes the whisky out of **Brooke's** hands.

Lloyd takes it back and hands it to **Brooke**. **Frederick** takes it away again to show it to **Dotty**, turning her round to show that it came from the fire bucket, just as . . .

. . . **Garry** makes his exit and sees **Dotty** now apparently being hugged by **Frederick**.——

Garry leans down from the platform and tips the plate of sardines he is carrying over **Dotty's** head. Everyone, even **Brooke**, half in and half out of her coat, watches, hands helplessly upraised.

Garry makes his entrance. ——

Dotty puts the whisky down on the steps to deal with the sardines on her head.

Garry makes his exit —— then picks up the whisky and takes a swig, very pleased with himself.

While **Garry** stands on the platform with his head back, **Dotty** climbs on a chair and ties his shoelaces together.

He dumps the silverware on the sofa and exits into the study.

Enter **Roger** from mezzanine bathroom.

Roger Where's she gone? Vicki?

—— Exit **Roger** into the bedroom.

Enter **Burglar** from the study, carrying **Philip's** box and bag. He empties the contents of the box out behind the sofa and loads the silverware into the box.

Burglar It's nice to hear a bit of shouting and screaming around you. All this silence gets you down.

—— Enter **Roger** from the linen cupboard, still holding the sardines.

Roger (calls) Vicki! Vicki!

—— Exit **Roger** into the bedroom.

Burglar I'm going to end up talking to myself . . .

Exit the **Burglar** into study, unaware of **Roger**.

Enter **Philip** from the downstairs bathroom. His right

Everyone, even **Brooke**,
watches, horrified.

Lloyd tries to warn **Garry**.
Garry brushes him aside
because he has an entrance coming
up.

Garry puts the whisky down
and . . .

makes his entrance —————
falling headlong over his feet.

Dotty demonstrates to
Belinda and **Lloyd** what she
did, half delighted and half
shocked at herself.

Everyone tries to see what's
happening on stage, also half
delighted and half shocked.

hand is still stuck to the tax
demand, his left to the plate of
sardines.

Philip Darling, this stuff
that eats through anything.
It eats through trousers!

He examines holes burnt in the
front of them.

Darling, if it eats through
trousers, you don't think it
goes on and eats through. . .
Listen, darling, I think I'd
better get these trousers off!
(He begins to do so, as best he
can.) Darling, I think I can
feel it! I think it's eating
through . . . absolutely
everything!

———— Enter **Roger** from the
bedroom, still holding the
sardines.

Roger There's something
evil in this house.

Philip pulls up his trousers.

Philip (aside) The Inland
Revenue!

Roger (sees **Philip**,
frightened) He's back!

Philip I must go.

Roger Stay!

Philip I won't, thank you.

Selsdon finds the bottle on the platform – yet another bottle!

Lloyd takes the whisky away from **Selsdon** mechanically.

Lloyd, Dotty, and Belinda all take swigs from it in turns, absent-mindedly, as they follow events on stage.

Dotty holds up her hand to get attention to the events on stage. She demonstrates that **Garry** is going to have to run downstairs.

They all wait for the crash.

*The sound of **Garry** falling downstairs.*—————

*Even **Selsdon** can hear it.*

*No sound from the stage.
Everyone listens and as they listen
the laughter dies away.*

Roger Speak!

Philip Only in the presence of my lawyer.

Roger Only in the presence of your . . . ? Hold on. You're not from the other world!

Philip Yes, yes – Marbella!

Roger You're some kind of intruder!

Philip Well, nice to meet you.

He waves goodbye with his right hand, then sees the tax demand on it and hurriedly puts it away behind his back.

I mean, have a sardine.

He offers the sardines on his left hand. His trousers, unsupported, fall down.

Roger No, you're not! You're some kind of sex maniac! You've done something to Vicki! I'm going to come straight downstairs . . .

—— **Roger** falls downstairs.

Frederick, *on stage*,
improvises a line.—————

No reply.

Belinda *turns to Dotty in
horror — she's killed him!*

Belinda *opens the study door to
go to Garry. Lloyd restrains
her.*

*At the sound of Garry's
voice*—————
they all relax.

Lloyd *takes another swig of
whisky.*

Frederick *makes his exit, —
trousers round his ankles,
handkerchief pressed to his nose.
He looks into his handkerchief
and comes over faint. Belinda
and Dotty catch him.*

Lloyd *remembers that
Brooke has an entrance coming
up. He attempts to peel the
overcoat off her.*

Brooke, *recoiling from this,
reverses into Belinda and
Dotty, staggering under the
weight of Frederick, and loses
her lenses.*

Belinda and Dotty *drop
Frederick and turn to deal
with this next problem.*

Garry *repeats the cue.*—————

———— **Philip** *Are you all
right?*

———— **Roger** (*faintly*) *This
is plainly a matter for the
police. (Into the phone.) Police!*

Philip *I think I'll be
running along.*

———— *He runs, his trousers still
round his ankles, out through the
front door.*

Roger *Come back . . . !
(Into the phone.) Hello . . .
police? Someone has broken
into my house! Or rather
someone has broken into
someone's house . . . No, but
he's a sex maniac! I left a
young woman here and
what's happened to her no
one knows!*

———— *And what's happened
to her no one knows!*

Garry appears, still hobbled, in the study doorway, and furiously repeats the cue yet again. ———

—— No one knows!

Belinda, Dotty and Lloyd guide **Brooke**, blinded and confused, and still wearing her overcoat, to the window for her entrance, cracking her head against the set on the way. ———

*They watch as **Brooke** falls headlong over the sofa on stage.*

—— Enter **Vicki** through the window.

Vicki There's a man lurking in the undergrowth!

Roger (*into the phone*) Sorry . . . the young woman has reappeared. (*Hand over phone.*) Are you all right?

Vicki No, he almost saw me!

Roger (*into the phone*) He almost saw her . . . Yes, but he's a burglar as well! He's taken our things!

Vicki (*finds Philip's bag and box*) The things are here.

Roger (*into the phone*) So what am I saying? I'm saying, let's say no more about it. (*He puts the phone down.*) Well, put something on!

Vicki I haven't got anything!

Roger There must be something in the bathroom!

Selsdon suggests to **Dotty** that the lenses may be in her clothes.

Selsdon searches **Dotty's** clothes. She can't understand what he's after.

Garry comes hobbling and raging off, ——— his shoes still tied together. He gazes in amazement at the sight of **Dotty** and **Selsdon**.

Garry repeats the cue. ———

Lloyd realises and rushes **Selsdon** on, as **Frederick** loads him with props. ———

Garry moves to commit violence upon everyone in sight, but the state of his shoes prevents him from getting more than a step or two before he has to return . . .

. . . to make his entrance. ———

Frederick takes over the search in **Dotty's** clothes.

He picks up the box and bag, and leads the way.

Bring the sardines!

She picks up the sardines.

——— *Exeunt **Roger** and **Vicki** into the downstairs bathroom.*

——— Bring the sardines!

——— *Enter the **Burglar** from the study and dumps more booty.*

Burglar Right, that's downstairs tidied up a bit. (*He starts upstairs.*) Just give the upstairs a quick going-over for them.

*Exit the **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom.*

——— *Enter **Vicki**, holding the sardines and a white bathmat, and **Roger**, carrying the box and bag, from the downstairs bathroom.*

Vicki A bathmat?

Roger Better than nothing!

Vicki I can't go around in front of our taxpayers wearing a bathmat!

He leads the way upstairs.

Roger *I'll look in the bedroom. You look in the other bathroom.*

Garry *makes his exit ——— and is amazed to see **Dotty** now apparently embracing **Frederick**.*

Garry *starts downstairs to attack **Frederick**. But he is still hobbled and in any case . . .*

Frederick *has to make his entrance. ———*

Garry *tries to get **Brooke** to untie him.*

*But **Brooke** blindly has to make her entrance. ———*

Lloyd *takes over the search of **Dotty**'s clothing. **Garry** gazes in astonishment.*

Tim *enters from the dressing-rooms and hands **Lloyd** a cactus.*

Brooke *runs towards the bedrooms then stops. **Belinda** watches this anxiously. ———*

Lloyd *hands the cactus to **Dotty** without looking at it while he searches.*

——— *Exit **Roger** into the bedroom and **Vicki** into the mezzanine bathroom.*

——— *Enter **Philip** through the front door.*

Philip *Darling! Help! Where are you?*

——— *Enter **Vicki** from the mezzanine bathroom.*

Vicki *Roger! Roger!*

*Exit **Philip** hurriedly, unseen by **Vicki**, into the downstairs bathroom.*

Vicki *There's someone in the bathroom now!*

——— **Flavia** *(off)* *Oh, darling, I'm finding such lovely things!*

Vicki *turns and runs downstairs instead, as **Flavia** enters along the upstairs corridor, absorbed in the china tea service she is carrying.*

Garry *hobbles downstairs, takes the cactus from the distracted **Dotty**, and rams it into **Lloyd**'s bottom. Then he hobbles back upstairs, still holding the cactus.*

Lloyd *tries to pursue him . . .
. . . but stops with a cry
of pain.*—————

Garry *puts the cactus down on the platform. He takes the ends of the black and white bedsheets that are hanging up outside the bedroom door, waiting for **Frederick** and **Brooke**, and ties them together.*

Vicki *exits hurriedly into the downstairs bathroom.*

Flavia Do you remember this china tea service —

—— **Vicki** *screams, off.*

Flavia — that you gave me on the very first anniversary of our . . . ?

*Enter **Vicki** from the downstairs bathroom. She stops at the sight of **Flavia**.*

Flavia Who are you?

Vicki Oh no — it's his wife and dependents!

She puts her hands over her face.

*Enter **Philip** from the downstairs bathroom, still with his hands encumbered, holding the bathmat now as well, and keeping his trousers up with his elbows.*

Philip Excuse me, I think you've dropped your dress.

Flavia *gasps. **Philip** looks up at the gallery and sees her.*

Philip *(to **Flavia**)* Where have you been? I've been going mad! Look at the state I'm in!

*He holds up his hands to show **Flavia** the state he is in and his trousers fall down. The tea service slips from **Flavia**'s horrified hands, and rains down on the floor of the living-room below. **Philip** hurries towards the stairs, trousers round his ankles, his hands extended in supplication.*

Philip Darling, honestly!

Brooke makes her exit ———

Brooke begins to take off her overcoat.

Garry picks up the cactus, but then has to hand it to **Brooke**. She peers at it, baffled, while . . .

. . . **Garry** makes his entrance. ———

Brooke comes down from the platform holding the cactus, then stops in amazement, overcoat half on and half off, at the sight of **Lloyd** lowering his trousers and **Dotty** pulling needles out of his bottom.

——— **Vicki** flees before him, comes face to face with **Flavia**, and takes refuge in the linen cupboard.

Philip She just burst into the room and her dress fell off!

*Exit **Flavia**, with a cry of pain, along the upstairs corridor.*

——— *Enter **Roger** from the bedroom, directly in **Philip**'s path.*

Philip holds up the bathmat in front of his face. He is invisible to **Roger**, though, because the latter is holding up a white bedsheet.

Roger Here, put this sheet on for the moment while I see if there's something in the attic.

Garry makes his exit ———
and also watches the scene below
in amazement. So does
Belinda.

Garry hobbles downstairs and
takes the cactus from **Brooke**
for use against **Lloyd** again.

Tim warns **Lloyd** about
Garry.

Lloyd quickly pulls up his
trousers.

Tim takes the cactus from
Garry. **Garry** snatches it
back, then has to hand it back to
Tim anyway so that he can grab
Vicki's dress from its hook
and . . .

——— **Roger** leaves **Philip**
with the sheet and exits along
upstairs corridor.

Philip turns to go back
downstairs.

Enter **Burglar** from the
mezzanine bathroom, holding two
gold taps.

Burglar One pair gold
taps . . .

He stops at the sight of **Philip**.

Oh, my Gawd!

Philip Who are you?

Burglar Me? Fixing the
taps.

Philip Tax? Income tax?

Burglar That's right,
governor. In come new taps
. . . out go old taps.

Exit **Burglar** into the
mezzanine bathroom.

Philip Tax-inspectors
everywhere!

Roger (off) Here you are!

Philip The other one!

Exit **Philip** into the bedroom,
holding the bathmat in front of his
face.

... make his entrance. —————

Lloyd lowers his trousers again for **Dotty** to resume operations.

Garry makes his exit —————
and **Lloyd** hurriedly decides that he needs no further attention.

Frederick makes his exit ———
and picks up the bedsheets, which are waiting for him and **Brooke** to put on. He flaps them at **Brooke** to remind her about her change.

Lloyd points out the flapping sheets to her, but she puts the overcoat back on to storm out again. **Lloyd** detains her desperately while he takes the cactus from **Tim** and gives it to her as a token of his enduring affection. She peers at it and he takes in the nature of the present for the first time himself. He turns in pained query to **Tim**, who gestures that it was all the shop

————— Enter **Roger** along the upstairs corridor, holding **Vicki**'s dress.

Roger I've found your dress! It came flying out of the attic at me!

————— Exit **Roger** into mezzanine bathroom.

Enter **Philip** from the bedroom, trying to pull the bathmat off his head.

Philip Darling! I've got her dress stuck to my head now!

Enter **Roger** from the mezzanine bathroom.

————— Exit **Philip** into the bedroom.

Roger Another intruder!

Enter the **Burglar** from the mezzanine bathroom.

Burglar Just doing the taps, governor.

Roger Attacks? Not attacks on women?

Burglar Try anything, governor, but I'll do the taps on the bath first.

had left — all the rest of their stock is now on **Poppy's** desk.

Lloyd takes the cactus back and kisses it, with painful results, to present to **Brooke** again.

Frederick flaps the sheets in desperation.

Brooke hesitates. Finally she takes off her overcoat, runs up the steps with the cactus.

Selsdon makes his exit. —

Brooke pushes the cactus into **Selsdon's** hands as she passes.

There is a swirl of sheets as **Frederick** attempts to dress **Brooke** in time for her entrance.

Frederick and **Brooke** make their separate entrances — and discover that they are unable

Exit **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom.

Roger Sex maniacs everywhere! Where is Vicki? Vicki . . . ?

Exit **Roger** into the downstairs bathroom.

Enter **Burglar** from the mezzanine bathroom, heading for the front door.

Burglar People everywhere! I'm off. A tax on women? I don't know, they'll put a tax on anything these days.

Enter **Roger** from the downstairs bathroom. The **Burglar** stops.

Roger If I can't find her, you're going to be in trouble, you see.

Burglar WC? I'll fix it.

— Exit **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom again.

Roger Vicki . . . ?

Exit **Roger** through the front door.

— **Philip** attempts to enter from the bedroom.

to because their sheets are attached to each other.

Belinda, upstairs for her entrance, goes to disentangle them. So does **Selsdon**, but he and the cactus together makes things worse.

Frederick and **Brooke** are half on and half off.——

Garry watches with pleasure, until **Lloyd** furiously drives him . . .

. . . on stage to hold the fort.——

Garry improvises.——

Tim takes off his raincoat and starts to put on the spare sheet to go on as **Frederick**'s double.

Lloyd rips it off him again, and gestures that it's needed as an emergency substitute for

Frederick's sheet. They pass the sheet to **Frederick**, but he is too entangled to do anything with it.

Belinda gestures desperately to **Lloyd** for the real **Sheikh**'s robes. **Lloyd** passes them up to **Belinda**, who hands them to **Frederick** . . .

. . . who is dragged on—— through the linen cupboard door by **Brooke**, still holding the second sheet and the real **Sheikh**'s robes.

—— **Vicki** attempts to enter from the linen cupboard.

—— Enter **Roger** through the front door.

—— **Roger** No Sheikh yet! I thought he was coming at four? I mean, it's nearly, you know, four now . . . Well, it's after three . . . Because I've been standing here for a good, you know, it seems like forever . . . What's the time now. It must be getting on for five . . .

—— Oh, you're here already, hiding in the, anyway . . . And this is your charming wife? So you want to see over the house now,

Belinda takes the cactus away from **Selsdon**, then hurriedly hands it down to **Lloyd** so that . . .

. . . she can make her entrance. —————

Lloyd puts the cactus in a safe place on the chairs downstairs.

Tim puts on the bathmat as burnous, to go on as **Philip**'s double, but gestures to **Lloyd** that he now has no sheet to wear, because it has vanished on stage with **Frederick**.

They both register despair.

Lloyd takes a despairing pull of whisky.

do you, Sheikh? Right. Well. Since you're upstairs already

Roger goes upstairs.

— Enter **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor, carrying a vase.

Flavia Him and his floozie! I'll break this over their heads!

Roger, Philip and Vicki go downstairs.

Roger (to **Philip** and **Vicki**) I'm sorry about this. I don't know who she is. No connection with the house, I assure you.

Enter **Mrs Clackett** from the service quarters, with another plate of sardines. **Roger** advances to introduce her.

Mrs Clackett No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines, 'cause this time I'm eating them.

Roger ushers **Philip** and **Vicki** away from **Mrs Clackett** towards the mezzanine bathroom.

He opens the door to the mezzanine bathroom.

Roger But in here . . .

Flavia Arab sheets?

Belinda exits. —————

Lloyd and **Tim** indicate the problem of the missing sheet to her.

She instantly indicates **Tim**'s own raincoat.

Lloyd puts it on **Tim** back to front.

They both gloomily inspect the result.

Frederick makes his exit — dragging **Brooke** backwards with him, since they are still attached to each other.

Selsdon improvises a line. —

Brooke struggles back on, — as best she can.

Tim makes his entrance in back-to-front raincoat. —————

Frederick has picked up the real burnous and flaps it in desperation as he realises that the

————— **Exit Flavia** into the bedroom.

Roger In here we have . . .

Enter the **Burglar** from the mezzanine bathroom.

Burglar Ballcocks, governor. Your ballcocks have gone.

Roger We have him.

Enter **Flavia** from the bedroom.

Mrs Clackett You give me that sheet, you devil!

She seizes the nearest sheet and it comes away in her hand to reveal **Vicki**.

Flavia comes downstairs menacingly.

————— **Exit Philip** discreetly into the study.

————— **Burglar** It's my little girl! So far as I could see before she went.

————— **Vicki** Dad!

————— Enter **Philip** from the study in amazement. (He is now played by a double — **Tim**.)

robes are still somewhere on stage. All **Lloyd** can find now as a substitute is **Brooke's** leopard-skin overcoat. He spins

Frederick round to put it on him back to front, as he did with **Tim** and the raincoat. He then crams the burnous on **Frederick's** head, but **Frederick** has continued to turn, so it hangs over his face instead of his neck. **Lloyd** crams the **Sheikh's** dark glasses on top of the burnous . . .

. . . and **Frederick** stumbles blindly back on stage. —————

Lloyd picks up the whisky, takes a weary swig, and is just about to sit down on the cactus when he springs up again guiltily, because **Poppy** is standing agitatedly in front of him.

She takes the whisky away from him and puts it down, desperate to secure his full attention. She whispers urgently to him. He can't understand. She whispers again, becoming more and more agitated. He puts a hand to his ear, meaning he can't hear.

Burglar Our little Vicki, that ran away from home, I thought I'd never see again!

Flavia (*threateningly*) So where's my other sheet?

————— *Enter through the front door a **Sheikh**, played by **Frederick**.*

Sheikh Ah! A house of heavenly peace! I rent it!

Roger Hold on, hold on . . . I know that face! (*Pulls the **Sheikh's** burnous aside to reveal his face.*) He isn't a sheikh! He's that sex-maniac!

They all fall upon him, and reveal that his trousers are around his ankles.

Burglar And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke I won't ask. But I'll tell you one thing, Vicki

Vicki What's that, Dad?

Poppy (*screams to Lloyd in despair*) I'm going to have a . . .

Selsdon *flings the front door open.* —————

Selsdon Good old-fashioned plate of *what* . . . ?

Poppy . . . baby!

Selsdon *goes back on stage.* —————

Poppy *claps her hand over her mouth, horrified.*

Lloyd (*whispers*) And curtain, perhaps?

Poppy Oh . . . !

She runs back to the corner to bring the curtain down. —————

Everyone appears in the doors and windows, eager to know more.

Lloyd *subsides, defeated, on to the cactus and springs up again in agony.*

CURTAIN

Burglar When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a . . .

————— *He dries and goes to the front door.*

Selsdon A good old-fashioned plate of gravy!

————— CURTAIN

Act Three

The curtain goes up to reveal the tabs of the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees. A half-empty whisky bottle nestles at the foot of them. The introductory music for Nothing On.

As the music finishes the tabs begin to rise. A foot or two above stage level they stop uncertainly, hover for a moment, and fall again.

Pause.

The introductory music starts again and is then faded out.

*Enter **Tim** from the wings, in his dinner jacket, but with elements of the **Burglar** 's gear visible beneath it, and the **Burglar** 's cap on his head.*

Tim Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. *(He removes the **Burglar** 's cap)* Welcome to the the Old Fishmarket Theatre, Lowestoft, or rather the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees, for this evening's performance of *Nothing On*. We apologise for the slight delay in starting tonight, which is due to circumstances ...

Belinda *(off, screaming but indistinguishable)* Hands off Freddie! All right?

Dotty *(off, screaming but indistinguishable)* You're the one who's trying to get their hands on Freddie!

Tim ... due to circumstances ...

Dotty *(off, screaming but indistinguishable)* You don't own him, you know!

Tim ... beyond our control ...

*The sound of a slap, off, and **Dotty** screams in pain, off.*

... and we would ask you to bear with us for a moment while we deal with her. With them. With the circumstances. I should perhaps say that with tonight's performance of the play our long and highly successful tour ...

Poppy *(over Tannoy)* Ladies and gentlemen. We apologise for the

delay in starting tonight, which is due to circumstances which have ...

Belinda (*over Tannoy*) Don't you dare! Don't you dare!

Poppy (*over Tannoy*) ... which have now been brought under control.

Tim ... our long and highly successful tour is on its very last legs. Its very last leg. Thank you for your ...

Poppy Thank you for your ...

Tim and Poppy (*together*) ... co-operation and understanding.

Tim I sincerely trust ...

He pauses for an instant to see if he will be interrupted again.

I sincerely trust there will be no other ...

He becomes aware of the whisky bottle.

... no other hiccups. No other hold-ups. So, ladies and gentlemen, will you please sit back and enjoy the remains of the evening.

Exit Tim. A slight pause, then his arm comes out from under the tabs and retrieves the bottle.

The introductory music for Nothing On, and this time the tabs rise. The act is being seen from the front again, exactly as it was the first time, at the rehearsal in Weston-super-Mare.

Enter slowly and with dignity from the service quarters, limping painfully, Mrs Clackett. She is holding a plate in her left hand and a handful of loose sardines in her right.

Mrs Clackett (*bravely*) It's no good you going on ...

She stops and looks at the phone. It hurriedly starts to ring.

I can't pick sardines off the floor and answer the phone.

She dumps the handful of sardines on the plate.

I've only got one leg.

She shifts the plate to her right hand and picks up the phone with the left.

(*into the phone, bravely*) Hello ... Yes, but there's no one here ... No, Mr Brent's not here ...

She puts the plate of sardines down next to the newspaper on the sofa as she speaks and picks up the newspaper. She shakes the outer sheet free and wipes her oily hand on it as best she can. The rest of the

newspaper disintegrates and falls back on top of the sardines.

He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain. Mr Philip Brent, that's right ... The one who writes the plays, only why he wants to get mixed up in plays God only knows, he'd be safer off in the lion's cage at the zoo ... No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here ... Am I in Spain ... ?

She realises that she is holding the sheet of newspaper instead of the sardines. She turns round to look for them as she speaks, winding herself into the telephone cord.

No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with ...

She sits down uncertainly on the heap of newspaper.

... because it's the royal what's it called on the telly – the royal you know ...

She realises that she is sitting on the sardines and extracts the plate as discreetly as possible as she speaks.

... And if it's to do with letting the house then you'll have to ring the house agents, because they're the agents for the house ... Squire, Squire, Hackham and who's the other one ... ?

She examines the flattened contents of the plate.

No, they're not in Spain, they're just a bit squashed. Squire, Squire, Hackham and, hold on ...

She stands up to go, uncertainly balancing plate, sheet of newspaper and phone.

... I'm going to do something wrong here.

She starts to go, then realises there are loose sheets of newspaper all over the floor and bends down to pick them up. The sardines slide off the plate on to the floor.

Always the same, isn't it.

She starts to go again.

One minute you've got too much on your plate ...

She realises that she has nothing on her plate, turns round and sees the sardines.

... next thing you know they've gone again.

She uncertainly drops a few sheets of the newspaper over the sardines and exits into the study, holding the empty plate and the telephone receiver. The body of the phone falls off its table and follows her to the door

*The sound of a key in the lock. The front door opens. On the doorstep is **Roger**, carrying a cardboard box.*

Roger ... I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

Enter Vicki.

The body of the phone begins to creep inconspicuously towards the door.

Roger So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

Roger goes back and brings in a flight bag and closes the front door.

I'll just check.

*He halts the telephone with a casually placed foot. **Vicki** gazes round.*

Roger Hello? Anyone at home? No, there's no one here.

He picks the phone up and puts it back on its table.

So what do you think?

He takes his hand off the phone and it springs back on to the floor.

Vicki Great. And this is all yours?

*The phone starts to creep away again. **Roger** casually picks it up as he talks and puts it down on the sideboard.*

Roger Just a little shack in the woods, really. Converted posset mill. Sixteenth-century.

Vicki It must have cost a bomb.

*Another jerk on the wire catapults the phone across the room. **Vicki** pays no attention to it.*

Roger Well, one has to have somewhere to entertain one's business associates. Someone on the phone now, by the look of it.

He picks the phone up and puts it back on the sideboard.

It's probably this, you know, this Arab saying he wants to come at four, so I mean I'll just have a word with him and ...

He tries to pick up the receiver and finds that it's not there. As the conversation continues he follows the receiver cord along with his hand.

Vicki Right, and I've got to get those files to our Basingstoke office by four.

Roger Yes, we'll only just manage to pick it in. I mean, we'll only just fit it up. I mean ...

Vicki Right, then.

Roger We won't bother to pull the champagne.

He pulls gently at the cord. **Vicki** All these doors!

Roger Oh, only a handful, really. Study ... Kitchen ... and a self-contained service flat ...

He tugs hard and the cord comes away without the receiver.

... for the receiver.

Vicki Terrific. And which one's the ... ?

Roger What?

Vicki You know ...

Roger The usual offices? Through here, through here.

He bundles up the phone and cable, and opens the downstairs bathroom door for her.

Vicki Fantastic.

Exit Vicki into the bathroom. Roger tosses the phone casually off after her.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, still walking with difficulty and holding the now cordless receiver.

Mrs Clackett I've lost the sardines again ...

Mutual surprise. Roger closes the door to the bathroom.

Roger I'm sorry. I thought there was no one here.

Mrs Clackett I'm not here. *(She looks round for the phone, so that she can replace the receiver)* I don't know where I am.

Roger I'm from the agents.

Mrs Clackett Lost the phone now.

Roger Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

Mrs Clackett Never lost a phone before.

Roger I'm Tramplemain.

Mrs Clackett I'll just put it up here, look, if anyone wants it. *(She puts the receiver on top of the television)*

Roger Oh, right, thanks. No, I just dropped in to ... go into a few things ...

The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it. Mrs Clackett gets down on her hands and knees, and looks under the newspaper.

Roger Well, to check some of the measurements ...

The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it. Mrs Clackett goes to scoop up the sardines, but then looks round.

Roger Do one or two odd jobs ...

The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.

Mrs Clackett Now the plate's gone.

Roger Oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective client over the house.

The bathroom door opens.

Vicki What's wrong with this door?

Roger closes it.

Roger She's thinking of renting it. Her interest is definitely aroused.

Enter Vicki from the bathroom.

Vicki That's not the bedroom.

Roger The bedroom? No, that's the downstairs bathroom and WC suite. And this is the ...

Roger steps forward on to the newspapers to introduce **Mrs Clackett**. His foot slides away in front of him.

Mrs Clackett Sardines, dear, sardines.

Vicki Oh. Hi.

Roger She's not really here.

Mrs Clackett (*looking under the newspaper*) Oh, you shouldn't have stood on them.

Roger (*to Mrs Clackett*) Don't worry about us.

Mrs Clackett They'll all go standing on them now.

Roger We'll just inspect the house.

Mrs Clackett I'd better give the floor a wash.

Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, leaving the sardines beneath the newspaper on the floor.

Roger I'm sorry about this.

Vicki That's all right. We don't want the television, do we?

Roger Television? That's right, television, she didn't explain about wanting to watch this royal, you know, because obviously there's been this thing with the ... *(He indicates the sardines)* I mean, I'm just, you know, in case anyone's looking at all this and thinking, 'My God!'

Vicki Great. Come on, then. *(She starts upstairs)* I've got to be in Basingstoke by four.

Roger Sorry, love. I thought we ought to get that straight.

Vicki We'll take it up with us.

Roger Where are we?

Vicki And don't let my files out of sight.

Roger Hold on. We've got out of ...

Vicki What?

Roger What?

Vicki Her?

Roger Her? OK ... 'her'. Right, because she *has* been in the family for generations.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, carrying a fire-bucket and a mop.

Mrs Clackett Sardines ... Sardines ... It's not for me to say, of course, dear, only I will just say this: don't think twice about it – take the plunge ... *(She plunges the mop into the fire-bucket.)* You'll really enjoy it here ... *(She discovers that the mop won't go into the fire-bucket.)*

Vicki Oh. Great.

Mrs Clackett *removes the obstruction – a bottle of whisky.*

Mrs Clackett I'll put it here, look, then if he wants it he won't know where to find it ...

Mrs Clackett *puts the bottle of whisky with the other bottles on the sideboard.*

Vicki Terrific.

Mrs Clackett Sardines, sardines. *(She hands the mop to Roger.)* You'll have to do the sardines, then, 'cause I've got to go back to the kitchen now and do some more sardines.

Exit Mrs Clackett to service quarters.

Vicki You see? She thinks it's great. She's even making us sardines!

Roger *(contemplates the bucket and mop uncertainly)* Well ...

Vicki I think she's terrific.

Roger Terrific.

Vicki So which way?

Roger I don't know – kind of parcel them up in the ...

(He holds out some sheets of newspaper to her.) And I'll ... *(He demonstrates the mop.)*

Vicki *(starts up the stairs)* Up here?

Roger Down here!

Vicki In here?

Roger OK, I'll do the ... you do the ...

Exit Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom. Roger parcels up the sardines in the newspaper as best he can.

Vicki It's another bathroom. *(She reappears)*

Roger *dumps the parcel of sardines on the telephone table while he dabs hurriedly at the floor with the mop.*

Roger Take the box upstairs, then! Take the bag!

Vicki Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

Roger Bag! Box!

Vicki *moves to stand outside the airing cupboard.*

Vicki Oh, black sheets!

Roger *(runs to the stairs with bucket and mop, and holds them out to Vicki)* All right, take the ... take the ... take the ... !

Vicki Oh, you're in a real state!

Roger *(despairingly)* Oh ... !

Roger *runs back and abandons the bucket and mop to pick up the bag and box.*

Vicki You can't even get the door open.

Exit Vicki into the bedroom.

Roger *runs back to collect the bucket and mop, just as the front door*

opens to reveal Philip , carrying a cardboard box.

Philip No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember. We've got the place ...

Philip freezes, as Roger flees upstairs with the bag and the box.

Philip follows Roger's progress out of the corner of his eye.

Enter Flavia , carrying a flight bag like Roger's.

The bedroom door shuts in Roger 's face. He opens the door again and exits into the bedroom with the bag and box.

Philip ... entirely to ourselves.

Flavia Home.

Philip Home, sweet home.

Flavia Dear old house!

Philip Just waiting for us to come back!

Flavia *(producing the remains of the phone)* But how odd to find the telephone in the garden!

Philip I'll put it back.

She hands him the phone – now in a very deteriorated condition – and he attempts to replace it on the telephone table. But it is still connected to its lead, which is too short, since it runs out through the downstairs bathroom door and back in through the front door.

Flavia I thought I'd better bring it in.

Philip Very sensible. *(He tugs discreetly at the lead)*

Flavia Someone's bound to want it.

Philip Oh dear. *(He tugs)*

Flavia Why don't you put it back on the table?

Philip The wire seems to be caught.

Flavia Oh, look, it's caught round the downstairs bathroom.

Philip So it is.

Philip takes the phone back out of the front room. Flavia with discreet violence pulls the lead out of the junction box where it originates. Philip re-emerges with the phone through the downstairs bathroom.

Flavia I think I've disentangled it.

Philip I climbed through the bathroom window and ... oh ... oh

...

He takes the parcel of sardines off the telephone table and puts the telephone in its place.

Flavia It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!

Philip It's damned serious! If Inland Revenue find out we're in the ...

Attempting to fold up the newspaper tidily, he becomes distracted by the contents that come oozing out over his hands. His voice dies away.

Flavia ... country, even for one night ...

Philip Sorry. *(He puts down the parcel of sardines on the sofa)* Yes, because if Inland Revenue find out we're in the ...

He moves towards the champagne and slides, exactly like Garry, on the oily patch on the floor. He stops and looks back on it in surprise.

Flavia ... country ...

Philip *(distracted)* ... country ...

Flavia ... even for one night.

Philip ... even for one night...

Philip *edges cautiously away from the oily patch.*

Flavia ... bang goes ...

He bangs into the bucket and mop.

Flavia ... our claim to be resident abroad ...

Philip *fumbles for his handkerchief and claps it to his nose.*

Philip Resident abroad. Absolutely. *(He looks into his handkerchief)*

Flavia Bang goes most of this year's income.

Philip Most of this year's income ... *(He puts the handkerchief away)* So, yes, I think I'd better ... *(He picks up bag and box, clutches them to himself for reassurance)* ... go and have a little lie-down.

He starts up the stairs.

Flavia *(surprised, but rallying)* Lie-down, yes, well, why not? No children. No friends dropping in ... *(She moves the sofa to cover the oily patch as she speaks)* We're absolutely on our ... Leave those!

Philip Oh, yes.

Philip *puts the bag and box down, but by this time he is already upstairs.*

Flavia Downstairs! Not upstairs!

Philip I'm so sorry. I ... *(He looks in his handkerchief again)* Oh dear ...

He exits hurriedly into bedroom.

Flavia *(picks up the fire-bucket and mop)* There is something to be said for being a tax exile ... *(She flees upstairs with the fire-bucket and mop, laughing)* Sh ... ! What? Inland Revenue may hear us!

Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters carrying a fresh plate of sardines.

Mrs Clackett *(to herself)* What I did with that first lot of sardines I shall never know.

She puts down the plate of sardines, and goes to sit on the sofa, on the parcel of sardines left there by Philip.

Flavia *(urgently, looking down from the gallery, still holding the bucket and mop)* Mrs Newspaper!

Mrs Clackett *jumps up.*

Mrs Clackett Oh, you give me a turn! My heart jumped right out of the sofa!

Flavia So did mine! We thought you'd gone!

Mrs Clackett *(finding the parcel of sardines and examining it)* I thought you was in Sardinia!

Flavia We are! We are! You haven't seen us! We're not here!

Mrs Clackett I can guess which one of them put this here.

Flavia Yes, but the main thing is that the Income Tax are after us.

Mrs Clackett Lovely helping of sardines to sit on.

Flavia So if anybody asks for us, you don't know nothing. Anything. So I'll just ... I'll just ... get a hot-water bottle.

She goes towards the mezzanine bathroom.

Mrs Clackett And off she goes without waiting to find out about his letters.

Flavia *(stops, realises despairingly)* His letters?

Enter Philip groggily from the bedroom.

Philip Letters? What letters? You forward all the mail, don't you?

Mrs Clackett Not presents from Sardinia, dear.

Philip I'm so sorry.

Exit Philip into the bedroom.

Mrs Clackett I'll show you where I put presents from Sardinia.

She goes upstairs towards Flavia, who is still outside the mezzanine bathroom, carrying the bucket and mop, not sure which way to move.

I put presents from Sardinia in the pigeonhouse.

Flavia In the pigeonhouse?

Mrs Clackett In the little pigeonhouse down here, love.

She stuffs the parcel of sardines down the front of Flavia's dress.

Flavia looks down at the dress, then at the fire-bucket and mop she is carrying. **Mrs Clackett** retires hurriedly back downstairs and exits into the study, with **Flavia** after her.

Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, but with no tie on.

Roger Yes, but I could hear voices!

He falls over Philip's bag and box.

Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear.

Vicki Voices? What sort of voices?

Roger Box voices. I mean, *people's* boxes.

Vicki But there's no one here.

Roger Darling, I saw the door-handle move! And these bags ... I'm not sure they were, you know, when we went into the, do you know what I mean?

Vicki I still don't see why you've got to put your tie on to look.

Roger (*picking up the bag and box*) Because if someone left these things outside the, I mean, come on, they obviously want them downstairs inside the, you know.

Vicki Mrs Clackett?

Roger It could be. Coming up here on her way to, well, carrying various, I mean, who knows?

Vicki (*looking over the banisters*) Oh look, she's opened our

sardines.

She moves to go downstairs. Roger puts down the bag and box outside the linen cupboard and grabs her.

Roger Come back!

Vicki What?

Roger I'll fetch them! You can't go downstairs like that.

Vicki Why not?

Roger Mrs Crackett.

Vicki Mrs Crackett?

Roger One has certain obligations.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, fishing sardines out of the front of her dress.

Mrs Clackett (to herself) Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like the Battle of Waterloo out there.

Roger *tries to pull open the linen cupboard door to conceal Vicki , but it is obstructed by the bag and box.*

Mrs Clackett Oh, you're still poking around, are you?

Roger Yes, still poking, well, still pulling.

He tugs at the door again, unaware of the obstruction, and the handle comes off as it opens.

Mrs Clackett Good job I can't see far with this leg.

Roger *moves the bag and box, gets Vicki inside the linen cupboard and rebalances the handle in place.*

Roger Just, you know, trying all the doors and I mean checking all the door handles.

He starts downstairs, carrying Philip 's bag and box.

Mrs Blackett.

Mrs Clackett Clackett, dear, Clackett.

Roger Mrs Clackett. Is there anyone else in the house, Mrs Clackett?

Mrs Clackett I haven't seen no one, dear.

Roger I thought I heard a box. I mean, I found these voices.

Mrs Clackett Voices? There's no voices here, love.

Roger I must have imagined it.

Philip (off) Oh, good Lord above!

The colossal sound of Philip falling downstairs, off, taking half the platform with him, followed by a wailing groan.

Roger I beg your pardon?

Mrs Clackett (mimicking **Philip**) Oh, good Lord above!

She crashes things about on the sideboard in imitation of the off-stage crash and ends the performance with a wailing groan.

Roger Why, what is it?

Mrs Clackett The study door's open.

She crosses and closes the door.

Roger They're going to want these inside the ... (He indicates the study) So I'll put them outside the ... (He indicates the front door) Then they can, do you know what I mean?

Exit Roger through the front door, carrying the bag and box.

Enter Flavia from the mezzanine bathroom, carrying a first-aid box. She sees the linen cupboard door swinging open as she passes, and pushes it shut, so that the latch closes. The handle comes off in her hand.

Flavia Nothing but flapping doors in this handle.

Exit Flavia into the bedroom, holding the first-aid box and the handle. Enter from the study Philip, holding a tax demand and its envelope. The part is now being played not by Frederick but by Tim.

Philip /**Tim**... final notice ... steps will be taken ... distraint ... proceedings in court ...

Mrs Clackett Oh, my Lord, who are you?

Philip /**Tim** I'm Philip.

Mrs Clackett You're Philip? What happened to you?

Philip /**Tim** Well, it's all got a bit slippery on the stairs out there.

Mrs Clackett You haven't done himself an injury?

Philip /**Tim** No. He's just a bit shaken. I'll be all right in a minute.

Exit Mrs Clackett to the study.

Philip /**Tim** You weren't going to tell me a gentleman had come about the house, were you?

Mrs Clackett (*off*) What?

Philip /Tim You weren't going to tell me a gentleman had come about the house?

Enter Mrs Clackett from the study.

Mrs Clackett That's right. A gentleman come about the house.

Philip /Tim Don't tell me. I'm not here.

Mrs Clackett Oh, and he's put your box out in the garden for you.

Philip /Tim Let them do anything. Just so long as you don't tell anyone we're here.

Mrs Clackett So I'll just sit down and turn on the ... sardines, I've forgotten the sardines! (*She finds the second plate of sardines on the table, exactly where she put it*) Oh, no, I haven't - I've remembered the sardines! What a surprise! I must go out to the kitchen and make another plate of sardines to celebrate.

Exit Mrs Clackett to the service quarters.

Philip /Tim I didn't get this! I'm not here. I'm in Spain. But if I didn't get it I didn't open it.

Enter Flavia from the bedroom. She is holding the dress that Vicki arrived in and the handle of the linen cupboard.

Flavia Darling ... (*She stares at Philip / Tim in surprise, then recovers herself and looks at the dress*) I never had a handle like this, did I?

Philip /Tim (*abstracted*) Didn't you?

Flavia I shouldn't buy anything as brassy as this.

Flavia drops the dress and attempts to replace the handle on the linen cupboard behind her back.

Oh, it's not something you gave me, is it?

Philip /Tim I should never have touched it.

Flavia No, it's lovely.

Philip /Tim Stick it down. Put it back. Never saw it.

Exit Philip/Tim into study.

Flavia Well, I'll put it in the attic, if anyone else wants to have a try.

Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor, taking the handle but leaving

the dress on the floor.

Enter Roger through the front door, without the bag and box.

Roger All right, all right ... Now the study door's open again! What's going on?

He goes towards the study, and opens and closes the door. He reacts to the sound of urgent knocking overhead.

Knocking.

Knocking.

Upstairs!

He runs upstairs. Knocking.

Oh my God, there's something in the ... *(He discovers the lack of a handle)* Oh my God! *(Knocking)* Listen! I can't, because the handle has, you know. You'll just have to ...

He demonstrates pushing. Knocking.

Come on! Come on!

Knocking.

I mean, whatever it is in there. Can you hear me? Darling!

Knocking.

Look, don't just keep banging! There's nothing I can, I mean it won't, there's nowhere to ...

Knocking. He opens the bedroom door.

Listen! Climb round into the ... *(He indicates the bedroom)* Squeeze through the, you know, and shin down the, I mean, there must be some way!

Knocking.

Oh, for pity's sake!

Exit Roger into the bedroom.

Enter Philip from the study, holding a tax demand and an envelope. He is now being played by Frederick, with a plaster on his head.

Philip '... final notice ... steps will be taken ... distraint ... proceedings in court ...'

Enter Roger from the bedroom, pulling Vicki after him. Philip gazes at them, baffled.

Roger Oh, it's you.

Vicki Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark with all black sheets and things.

Roger I put you in *there*, but you managed to squeeze through the, you know.

Vicki Why did *I* lock the door? Why did *you* lock the door!

Roger I couldn't, I mean, look, look, it's come off!

Vicki *Someone* locked the door!

Philip Sorry.

Exit Philip apologetically into study.

Roger Anyway, we can't stand here like this.

Vicki Like what?

Roger I mean, you know, with people going in and out.

Vicki OK, I'll take it off.

Roger In here, in here!

He ushers her into the bedroom.

Enter Philip cautiously from the study, holding the tax demand and the envelope.

Philip '... final notice ... steps will be taken ... distraint ... proceedings in court ...'

Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the first-aid box.

He looks up and down the landing.

Enter Vicki from the bedroom.

Philip *stares at them.*

Vicki Now what?

Roger A hot-water box! *I* didn't put it there!

Vicki *I* didn't put it there.

Philip Sorry.

Exit Philip into the study.

Roger Someone in the bathroom, filling first-aid bottles.

Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom.

Vicki (*anxious*) You don't think there's something creepy going on?

Exit Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom.

Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor.

Flavia Darling ... Darling?

Enter Philip cautiously from the study. He raises the income tax demand to speak.

Flavia Darling, are you coming to bed or aren't you?

Exit Flavia into the bedroom.

Philip raises his income tax demand to speak.

Enter Roger and Vicki from the mezzanine bathroom.

Roger What did you say?

Vicki I didn't say anything.

Exit Philip into the study.

Roger I mean, first there's the door handle. Now there's the first water box.

Vicki I can feel goose pimples all over.

Roger Yes, quick, get something round you.

Vicki Get the covers over our heads.

Roger is about to open the bedroom door.

Roger Just a moment. What did I do with those sardines?

He goes downstairs. Vicki makes to follow.

Roger You – wait here.

Vicki (*uneasily*) You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.

Roger Yes, but this one has been extensively modernised throughout. I can't see how anything creepy would survive oil-fired central heating and ...

Vicki What? What is it?

Roger looks round.

Vicki What's happening?

Roger The sardines. They've gone. (*He double-takes on them*) No, they haven't. They're here. Oh. Well. My God ... I mean ... my God!

He turns and starts back upstairs.

Flavia crawls through the front door. She picks up the sardines and takes them back to the front door.

Roger You put a plate of sardines down for two minutes, and the last thing you expect to find, I mean, these days, the one thing you don't expect to find when you come back is a plate of, I mean that's *really* weird!

Vicki Perhaps there is something funny going on. I'm going to get into bed and put my head under the ...

She freezes at the sight of the empty table outside the bedroom door.

Roger Because, I mean, there they are! Exactly where I ...

He realises that the sardines are not there.

Vicki Bag ...

Roger goes back downstairs to investigate. **Vicki** runs after him. **Flavia** , unseen by **Roger** , hesitates. She glances up towards the landing, reminded by the mention of the bag that she has failed to set it. She looks back at the table, realising that **Roger** now expects the sardines to be on the table.

Roger No, they're not. I suppose Mrs Sprockett must have, I mean, what is going on?

He looks at Vicki. Flavia hurriedly replaces the sardines.

Vicki Bag!

Flavia exits hurriedly through the front door.

Roger Bag?

Vicki Bag! Bag!

She drags Roger back upstairs.

Roger What do you mean, bag, bag?

Roger looks over the banisters and sees the sardines.

Sardines!

Vicki Bag! Bag! Bag!

Roger Sardines! Sardines!

Vicki Bag! Bag! Bag!

Roger Sardines! Sardines!

Vicki Bag! Bag! Bag!

While Roger is gazing at the sardines, and Vicki is looking at Roger , the bedroom door opens and Flavia puts the flight bag on the table outside.

Roger (*tearing himself away from the sight of the sardines*) Bag? What bag?

Vicki (*gazing at the bag*) No bag!

Roger No bag?

Vicki Your bag! Suddenly! Here! Now – gone!

Roger It's in the bedroom. (*He sees the bag.*) It was in the bedroom. I put it in the bedroom. I'll put it back in the bedroom.

As **Roger** goes to open the bedroom door it opens in front of him, and **Flavia** begins to come out, carrying the box.

Vicki Don't go in there!

Roger finds himself holding the box, with the door closing in his face.

Roger The box!

Vicki The box?

Roger They've *both* not gone!

Vicki Oh! My files!

Roger What on earth is happening? Where's Mrs Spratchett?

He starts downstairs with the bag and box. Vicki follows him.

Roger You wait in the bedroom.

Vicki No! No! No! *She runs downstairs.*

Roger At least put your dress on!

Vicki I'm not going in there!

Roger I'll fetch it for you, I'll fetch it for you!

He puts the bag and box down at the head of the stairs, returns to the bedroom and sees the dress on the floor.

Exit Roger into the bedroom.

Vicki Yes, quick – let's get out of here!

Enter Roger from the bedroom.

Roger Your dress has gone.

As he speaks he slides the dress over the edge of the gallery with his foot to get rid of it. It falls on top of Vicki beneath and makes her jerk her head. She feels blindly around her; her lenses have gone again.

Vicki I'm never going to see Basingstoke again!

Roger Don't panic! Don't panic! There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this.

He starts downstairs, looking over the banisters, appalled at the sight of Vicki below, and falls headlong over the bag and box at the top of the stairs.

Vicki *searches blindly behind the sofa for her missing lenses.*

Enter Philip from the study. He is holding the tax demand and the envelope.

Philip ... final notice ... steps will be taken ... distraint

His voice dies away at the sight of 'Roger' lying at the bottom of the stairs.

Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying various pieces of bric-a-brac.

Flavia Darling, if we're not going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic ...

Philip (to Roger) Oh dear. *(He claps a handkerchief to his nose)*

Flavia Oh, great heavens!

She rushes downstairs.

Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, holding another plate of sardines.

Mrs Clackett No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines ... *(She sees Roger.)* ... 'cause this time she has, she's gone and killed him!

Flavia He's stunned, that's all. Keep going.

Roger *(lifting his head)* Don't panic! Don't panic!

Flavia He's all right! Just keep going!

Roger There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this.

Mrs Clackett Where are we?

Roger I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening ...

Mrs Clackett You've fetched her. I'm here.

Roger I've fetched Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening.

Mrs Clackett She won't, you know.

Flavia *I'll tell you what's happening.*

Roger There's a man in there! Yes?

Flavia He's not in there, my precious – he's in here, look, and so am I.

Mrs Clackett No, no, there's no one in the house, love.
Yes?

Flavia No, look, I know this is a great surprise for everyone. I mean, it's quite a shock for us, finding a man lying at the bottom of the stairs! (*To Philip.*) Isn't it, darling?

Philip Oh dear. (*He looks into his handkerchief*) Oh dear, oh dear. (*He sits down hurriedly*)

Flavia But now we've all met we'll just have to ... Well, we'll just have to introduce ourselves! Won't we, darling?

Philip Introduce ourselves. (*He struggles to his feet, but has to sit down again*) I'm so sorry.

Flavia This is my husband. I'm afraid surprises go straight to his nose!

Vicki rises blindly from behind sofa at her cue.

Vicki There's a man lurking in the undergrowth!

Flavia Oh, how delightful – another unexpected guest. (*To Vicki.*) So why don't you ... why don't you ... see what you can see in the garden?

She pushes Vicki out of the front door, and helps Philip to his feet.

(*to Philip*) And darling, you go off and get that bottle marked poison in the downstairs loo. That eats through anything.

Philip (*from behind his handkerchief*) Eats through anything. Right. Thank you. Thank you. Yes, I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.

He opens the downstairs bathroom door to go off. A pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through and releases the catch. The window opens, and through it appears the Burglar, played by Tim.

Burglar/Tim No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

He climbs in and looks round in surprise to find the room full of people.

Mrs Clackett Come in and join the party, love.

Flavia A burglar! This is most exciting!

Philip Oh dear, this is my fault. Because when I say, 'I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, this is ridiculous', and I open this door...

He opens the downstairs bathroom again. Another pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through.

*Enter through the window the **Burglar**, played by **Selsdon**.*

Burglar/Selsdon No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

He climbs in, becoming uneasily aware of the others as he does so.

Burglar/Tim No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep.

Mrs Clackett I know, love, it's getting like a funeral in here.

Burglar/Selsdon When I think I used to do banks!

Flavia Just keep going.

Burglar/Selsdon and Burglar/Tim (together) When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags ...

Flavia Keep going.

Burglar/Selsdon Stop?

Flavia No, no!

Burglar/Selsdon I thought the coast was clear, you see. I saw him going out to the bathroom.

Flavia (closing the downstairs bathroom door) Yes, never mind, it's all right. We'll think of something.

Burglar/Selsdon Oh, no, I was listening most carefully. What's it he says?

Philip 'I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.'

Burglar/Selsdon And he opened the door ...

Burglar/Selsdon *opens the downstairs bathroom door to demonstrate.*

*A third pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through. Enter through the window the **Burglar**, played by*

Lloyd.

Burglar/Lloyd No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

He climbs in, very uncertain what's happening to him. He doesn't know whether to react to the presence of the others or not.

Mrs Clackett They always come in threes, don't they.

All Three Burglars When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults ...

Flavia Hold on! We know this man! He's not a burglar!

She snatches Lloyd's Burglar hat off.

He's our social worker!

Roger He's *what*?

Flavia He's that nice man who comes in and tells us *what to do*!

Lloyd (*appalled, faintly*) What to do?

Others (*firmly*) What to do!

Lloyd *is paralysed with stage-fright. He looks round helplessly and makes vague and ineffectual gestures.*

Selsdon What's he saying?

Flavia He's saying, he's saying – just get through it for doors and sardines! Yes? That's what it's all about! Doors and sardines! (*To Lloyd.*) Yes?

Lloyd (*helplessly*) Doors and sardines!

Others Doors and sardines!

They all try to put this into practice. Philip picks up the sardines and runs around trying to find some application for them. The others open various doors, fetch further plates of sardines, and run helplessly around with them. Lloyd stands helplessly watching the chaos he has created swirl around him.

Flavia He's saying, he's saying – 'Phones and police'!

Lloyd Phones and police ...

Philip Phone!

Philip and Roger are each handed a half of the phone.

Roger Police!

Roger puts the receiver to his ear. **Philip** dials.

Flavia He's saying 'Bags and boxes'.

Others Bags and boxes!

Everyone runs around with the two boxes and the two bags, all helplessly colliding with each other and running into the furniture.

Flavia (*decisively*) Sheets, sheets! He's saying 'Sheets'!

Lloyd Sheets ...

Others (*desperately*) Sheets!

Roger runs out of the study door, **Tim** out of the front door.

Flavia He's saying 'All we want now is a nice happy ending!'

Roger comes back at once propelling the helpless **Vicki** , wrapping her in the white sheet as they go. **Tim** comes back simultaneously with **Poppy** , cramming her into the real **Sheikh** 's robes.

Dotty (*looking at Poppy*) And here she is! In her wedding dress!

Flavia (*looking at Vicki*) Yes, yes – it's their wedding day!

Mrs Clackett (*still looking at Poppy*) It's their wedding day!

Others Ah!

Flavia What a happy ending!

Mrs Clackett pushes **Poppy** to **Lloyd's** side. **Flavia** pushes **Vicki** to his other side.

Mrs Clackett Do you take this sheet to be your lawful wedded wife? If not, speak now, or forever hold your peace.

Lloyd nods helplessly.

Selsdon What's he saying, what's he saying?

Flavia He's saying ... he's saying ... 'Last line!'

Selsdon Last line? Me?

All Last line, last line!

Selsdon When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a good old-fashioned plate of ...

He dries.

All (*holding up plates of sardines; beseechingly*) Curtain!

Tableau. Then Tim runs hurriedly off.

CURTAIN

Except that it jams just above the level of their heads. As one man

they seize hold of it and drag it down. A ripping sound. The curtain detaches itself from its fixings and falls on top of them all, leaving a floundering mass of bodies on stage.

Nothing On

Extracts from the programme

Grand Theatre

WESTON-SUPER-MARE

Proprietors: GRAND THEATRE (Weston-super-Mare) LIMITED General
Manager: E.E.A. GRADSHAW

The Grand Theatre Weston-super-Mare is a Member of the Grand Group.

Evenings at 7.45 Matinee: Wednesday at 2.30 Saturday at 5.00 and 8.30

Commencing Tuesday 15th January for One Week Only

Otstar Productions Ltd present

DOTTY OTLEY

BELINDA BLAIR GARRY LEJEUNE

in

NOTHING ON

by

ROBIN HOUSEMONGER

with

SELSDON MOWBRAY

BROOKE ASHTON

FREDERICK FELLOWES

Directed by LLOYD DALLAS

Designed by GINA BOXHALL

Lighting by ROD WRAY

Costumes by PATSY HEMMING

WORLD PREMIERE PRIOR TO NATIONAL TOUR!

SMOKING IS NOT PERMITTED IN THE AUDITORIUM

The use of cameras and tape recorders is forbidden.

The management reserve the right to refuse admission, also to make any
alteration in

the cast which may be rendered necessary by illness or other unavoidable causes.

From the theatre rules 'All exits shall be available for use during all performances'.

'The fire curtain shall be lowered during each performance'.

NOTHING ON

by ROBIN HOUSEMONGER

Cast in order of appearance:

Mrs Clackett

Roger Tramplemain

Vicki

Philip Brent

Flavia Brent

Burglar

Sheikh

DOTTY OTLEY

GARRY LEJEUNE

BROOKE ASHTON

FREDERICK FELLOWES

BELINDA BLAIR

SELSDON MOWBRAY

FREDERICK FELLOWES

The action takes place in the living-room of the Brents' country home, on a Wednesday afternoon.

for OTSTAR PRODUCTIONS LTD

Company and Stage Manager TIM ALLGOOD

Assistant Stage Manager POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR

Production credits

Sardines by Old Salt Sardines. Antique silverware and cardboard boxes by Mrs J.G.H. Norton-Taylor. Stethoscope and hospital trolley by Severn Surgical Supplies. Straitjacket by Kumfy Restraints Ltd. Coffins by G. Ashforth and Sons.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of EUROPEAN BREWERIES in sponsoring this production.

Behind The Dressing Room Doors

DOTTY OTLEY (Mrs Clackett) makes a welcome return to the stage to create the role of Mrs Clackett after playing Mrs Hackett, Britain's most famous lollipop lady ('Ooh, I can't' ardly 'old me lolly up!') in over 320 episodes of TV's ON THE ZEBRAS. Her many stage appearances include her critically acclaimed portrayal of Fru Säckett, the comic char in Strindberg's SCENES FROM THE CHARNELHOUSE. Her first appearance ever? In a school production of HENRY IV PART I – as the old bag-lady, Mrs Duckett.

BELINDA BLAIR (Flavia Brent) has been on the stage since the age of four, when she made her debut in SINBAD THE SAILOR at the old Croydon Hippodrome as one of Miss Toni Tanner's Ten Tapping Tots. She subsequently

danced her way round this country, Southern Africa, and the Far East in shows like ZIPPEY-DOODA! and HERE COME LES GIRLS! More recently she has been seen in such comedy hits as DON'T MR DUDDLE!, WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING IN MY BED?, and TWICE TWO IS SEX. She is married to scriptwriter Terry Wough, who has contributed lead-in material to most of TV's chat shows. They have two sons and three retrievers.

GARRY LEJEUNE (Roger Tramplemain) while still at drama school won the coveted Laetitia Daintymen Medal for Violence. His television work includes POLICE!, CRIME SQUAD, SWAT, FORENSIC, and THE NICK, but he is probably best-known as 'Cornetto', the ice-cream salesman who stirs the hearts of all the lollipop ladies in ON THE ZEBRAS.

SELSDON MOWBRAY (Burglar) first 'trod the boards' at the age of 12 – playing Lucius in a touring production of JULIUS CAESAR, with his father, the great Chelmsford Mowbray, in the lead. Since then he has served in various local reps, and claims to have appeared with every company to have toured Shakespeare in the past half-century, working his way up through the Mustard-seeds and the various Boys and Sons of, to the Balthazars, Benvolios, and Le Beaus; then the Slenders, Lennoxes, Trinculos, Snouts, and Froths; and graduating to the Scroops, Poloniuses, and Aguecheeks. His most recent film appearance was as Outraged Pensioner in GREEN WILLIES.

BROOKE ASHTON (Vicki) is probably best known as the girl wearing nothing but 'good, honest, natural froth' in the Hauptbahnhofbrau lager commercial. Her television appearances range from Girl at Infants' School in ON THE ZEBRAS to Girl in Massage Parlour in ON PROBATION. Cinemagoers saw her in THE GIRL IN ROOM 14, where she played the Girl in Room 312.

FREDERICK FELLOWES (Philip Brent) has appeared in many popular television series, including CALLING CASUALTY, CARDIAC ARREST!, OUT-PATIENTS, and IN-PATIENTS. On stage he was most recently seen in the controversial all-male version of THE TROJAN WOMEN. He is happily married, and lives near Crawley, where his wife breeds pedigree dogs. 'If she ever leaves me,' he says, 'it will probably be for an Irish wolfhound!'

ROBIN HOUSEMONGER (Author) was born in Worcester Park, Surrey, into a family 'unremarkable in every way except for an aunt with red hair who used to sing all the high twiddly bits from THE MERRY WIDOW over the tea-table'. He claims to have been the world's most unsuccessful gents hosiery wholesaler, and began writing 'to fill the long hours between one hosiery order and the next'. He turned this experience into his very first play, SOCKS BEFORE MARRIAGE, which ran in the West End for nine years. Two of his subsequent plays, BRIEFS ENCOUNTER and HANKY PANKY, broke box office records in Perth, Western Australia. NOTHING ON is his seventeenth play.

LLOYD DALLAS (Director) 'read English at Cambridge, and stagecraft at the local benefits office'. He has directed plays in most parts of Britain, winning the South of Scotland Critics' Circle Special Award in 1969. In 1972 he directed a highly successful season for the National Theatre of Sri Lanka. In recent years he has probably become best known for his brilliant series of 'Shakespeare in Summer' productions in the parks of the inner London boroughs.

A Glimpse of the Noumenal

(condensed from J G Stillwater, *Eros Untrousered - Studies in the Semantics of Bedroom Farce*)

The cultural importance of the so-called 'bedroom farce', or 'English sex farce', has long been recognised, but attention has tended to centre on the metaphysical significance of mistaken identity and upon the social criticism implicit in the form's ground-breaking exploration of cross-dressing and transgender role-playing. The focus of scholarly interest, however, is now beginning to shift to the recurrence of certain mythic themes in the genre, and to their religious and spiritual implications.

In a typical bedroom farce, a man and a woman come to some secret or mysterious place (cf *Beauty and the Beast*, *Bluebeard's Castle*, etc.) to perform certain acts which are supposed to remain concealed from the eyes of the world. This is plainly a variant of the traditional 'search' or 'quest', the goal of which, though presented as being 'sexual' in nature, is to be understood as a metaphor of enlightenment and transcendence. Some partial disrobing may occur, to suggest perhaps a preliminary stripping away of worldly illusions, but total nudity (perfect truth) and complete 'carnal knowledge' (i.e. spiritual understanding) are perpetually forestalled by the intervention of coincidental encounters (often with other seekers engaged in parallel 'quests'), which bear a striking resemblance to the trials undergone by postulants in various esoteric cults (cf. *The Magic Flute*, *Star Wars*, etc.).

A recurring and highly significant feature of the genre is a multiplicity of doors. If we regard the world on this side of the doors as the physical one in which mortal men are condemned to live, then the world or worlds concealed behind them may be thought of as representing both the higher and more spiritual plane into which the postulants hope to escape, and the underworld from which at any moment demons may leap out to tempt or punish. When the doors do open, it is often with great suddenness and unexpectedness, highly suggestive of those epiphanic moments of insight and enlightenment which give access to the 'other', and offer us a fleeting glimpse of the noumenal.

Another recurring feature is the fall or loss of trousers. This can be readily recognised as an allusion to the Fall of Man and the loss of primal innocence. The removal of the trousers traditionally reveals a pair of striped underpants, in which we recognise both the stripes of the tiger, the feral beast that lurks in all of us beneath the civilised exterior suggested by the lost trousers, and perhaps also a premonitory representation of the stripes caused by the whipping which was formerly the traditional punishment for fornication.

Farce, interestingly, is popularly categorised as 'funny'. It is true that the form often involves 'funny' elements in the sense of the strange or uncanny, such as supposedly supernatural phenomena, and behaviour suggestive of demonic possession. But the meaning of 'funny' here is probably also intended to include its secondary sense, 'provocative of laughter.'

This is an interesting perception. It scarcely needs to be said that laughter, involving as it does the loss of self-control and the spasmodic release of breath,

a vital bodily fluid, is a metaphorical representation of the sexual act. But it can also occasion the shedding of tears, which suggests that it may in addition be a sublimated form of mourning. Indeed we recognise here a symbolic foretaste of death. If sneezing has been widely feared because it is thought that during a sneeze the soul flies out of the body, and may not be recaptured (whence 'Bless you!' or '*Gesundheit!*'), then how much more dangerous is laughter. Not once but over and over again the repeated muscular contractions and expulsions of breath drive the 'soul' forth from the body. The danger of laughter is recognised in such expressions as 'killingly funny,' and 'I almost died'. There is a lurking fear that even more spectacular violence may ensue, and that a farce may end with a bloodletting as gruesome as in *Oedipus* or *Medea*, if people are induced to 'split their sides' or 'laugh their heads off.

Fear of the darker undertones of bedroom farce has sometimes in the past led to its dismissal as 'mere entertainment'. As the foregoing hopefully makes clear, though, financial support by the Arts Council or a private sponsor for the tour of a bedroom farce would be by no means out of place.

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